



勇者

呪術師は

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Illustration 誉

になれない

A thaumaturge
can't be a brave.

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レッドライジング
ボックス

Jujutsushi Wa Yuusha Ni Narenai

Act 4: Two-Headed Hound

by Hishi Kage Dairi

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Chapter 25: Blooming

“Y-yaay! I, I did it Momokawa-kuuun!”

Saying that, Futaba-san rushes over to me innocently smiling ear-to-ear. Making vigorous splashes on the puddles of blood underfoot.

“Ah, yup... You sure did...”

With an expression of mute amazement, I welcome back a Futaba-san who’s frolicking over as if she was a pet dog in high spirits after its owner came home after a long day’s work.

Calm down. Right now in front of me, the concaved heads, the smashed faces, the torn apart and scattered limbs, all these utterly massacred corpses of Goma floating in pools of blood, they’re things to be happy about. It’s a scene you ought not to be simply happy about as a sane human being, but this is the very thing, the thing I wished for from the bottom of my heart.

Yes, I, just moments ago, witnessed the absolutely awe-inspiring power of Futaba-san’s new vocation, Berserker.

“Yup, you’re awesome Futaba-san!”

“*Fue, e, ehehe...* Thankyou, Momokawa-kun”

Futaba-san was reddening at the cheeks as if her beloved had complemented her homemade cooking, but really, is that the appropriate conduct for a girl of age being praised on her killing technique?

Still, Futaba-san herself had been deeply worried about her state of powerlessness, so being this happy might just be as expected.

“You really were! To think you could fight that good—”

Our location: that fateful T-junction where I laughably fell into a trap set by the Goma. The very same place where Futaba-san went berserk due to drugs and annihilated hordes of Goma, and here once again, she had conducted a festival of blood featuring Goma.

The reason we expressly returned back here was because of Futaba-san’s

strong request to try fighting using the power of Berserker. In short, battle testing.

I myself am also greatly interested in that power. The person herself is willing, and there was no reason to stop her either.

The weapons I had overexerted myself to carry back along with the collapsed Futaba-san, equipping her with the at-a-glance usable axe and dagger, ones with little rusting, we ventured forth and arrived here. Rather than blindly searching for targets, we figured we'd find some friends of those Goma coming back to scout out the situation, or maybe to retrieve their gear.

If they came back with a huge number of reinforcements, we had plans to retreat immediately, but lucky for us, the ones casually greeting our eyes were a small 5-man unit. Looked like they were only here for scavenging gear. Literally no intention to provide relief to the injured. Well, looking at the bodies, you can't really judge anything other than instant death though.

We then surveilled our surroundings looking for signs of ambush. Making sure that those 5 are the only ones there, we went for it.

Going all out, I preemptively used Blackhair Bind to entwine one of them by the feet. At the same time, Futaba-san rushed out with a momentum unbelievable considering her mass, and headed towards the enemy without the least show of indecision or doubt.

Thereafter, the fight ended in the blink of an eye. As if my shabby support was completely unneeded, Futaba-san smashed the Goma one after the other.

No matter how many Power Seeds she pops, those little things bringing out this level of strength is blatantly outside predictions.

Luckily, the Goma were fairly spread apart for purposes of equipment retrieval. Before they could gather and display any teamwork, Futaba-san nimbly and orderly buried them.

The axe swung down to split their skulls like butter, and the fist thrust into their faces, pulverizing them. Aimless swings would make the limbs of the thin Goma blast off. With simple kicks, they'd dance in the air like a soda can, heading towards the tree branches lining the sides of the passage, getting

skewered.

And with that, we get to the part where Futaba-san goes “Yaay” with a smile and comes back towards me.

“Still, even without any psyche type Skills, you sure did it well”

You sure killed ‘em good, maybe saying that would be appropriate.

I had thought that Futaba-san, with her gentle and cowardly personality would be hopeless in fights without a Psyche Skill like Concentrate which made you forget fear.

Still, Futaba-san changing jobstenshoku into the vocationtenshokuBerserker... erm, I’m gonna trip up those words... anyway, her getting new powers, and consequently not requiring any Skills that mess with the psyche, is something I’m already aware of.^[1]

Still she, displayed an almost refreshing level of carnage befitting one titled Berserker. Really, what astounding of change of heart, or maybe I can call it growth?

Don’t tell me, there’s still some residual effects of the drugs?

“Yep, you know, I... if it’s to help Momokawa-kun, I can do it”

As if sensing something, Futaba-san declared so with a bright smile. *I’ll fight to protect someone*, it’s like the mentality of shonen manga protagonists.

That would make me the heroine? If the strong and cool MC will go ahead and unfailingly protect a cumbersome and hysteric bitch “‘cause she’s the heroine”, then I’ll gladly become one.^[2]

“Uh huh, but, it’s not scary? Also, the blood or dead bodies, you’re ok on that?”

“A bit scary yeah. But maybe because I’ve run wild once already... I feel like I’ve gotten more used to it”

I see, indeed Futaba-san hadn’t voluntarily killed a Monster even once before rampaging like that. Is it like, having done it once, it’s no big deal anymore?

“And for the bodies, they don’t bother me at all. I’m used to them from

cooking, also, work collecting cores from when I was with Class Rep, it wasn't that bad"

On dismantling bodies, with her prided real-world cooking skill, she's already top class. Nevertheless, considering the average extent of cooking, there'd be no way she's familiar with large bodied animals... but perhaps, she may just have experience stripping whole cows or pigs.

"Ah! That's right, now that we're here, I'll go get the cores!"

Maybe because Goma are fated to be simply mob Monsters, we don't have much hopes of getting many of those crystals of mana AKA cores. But it's not like there's none. Of course, the ones we get would all be fragments smaller than pebbles. Well, it's better than nothing.

"Then, I'll leave it to you. I'll collect the gear"

And for a short period, I busied myself scavenging through rotting flesh. *Won't these bodies suddenly disappear and leave behind some raw material and gold as drop items*, I work while inadvertently thinking dumb things.

"U-uhm, Momokawa-kun... D-don't look ok... it's embarrassing..."

"Don't worry, I'm not, I'm not looking"

Though I say that, if asked whether I *want* to look or not, I want to. I totally want to.

"U, uu..."

An embarrassed moan which sounds ever so close to crying. Along which, *rustle*, the faint sound of clothes in friction. Futaba-san was, at this very moment, stripping. Live undressing highschool girl.

Clear all thought. Calm down, Momokawa Kotarou. If thou, at this instance, looseth reason and turneth thy visage, what awaiteth thee is not but a face disfigured by the hand of ye Berserker. Yeah, I really don't wanna be friends of those Goma turned meat lumps and blood pools.

Well, disregarding that, for the foreseeable future I need to make sure I don't do anything to lose Futaba-san's trust. So right now, I declare my vocation to be Gentleman.

“K-kay then, let’s concentrate on these meds”

I tell myself, as I grind away making Ointment A with a Fairy Walnut tree to my back.

After the battle with and highway robbery of Goma, we returned back to the Fairy Square. After getting our first loot since starting the whole dungeon capture, the top-notch feeling of satisfaction plus hope for the future, in addition to the convenience of it all, all of it gathered into one big sigh of relief.

And was it because of such a relief? We finally noticed— the smell.

A natural conclusion. Dropped into this otherworld, it has undoubtedly been more than a day. Right about now, it’s probably the 2nd or 3rd day. In that timeframe, we haven’t changed clothes even once.

Moreover, Futaba-san and I both have experienced blood-soaked battle. It’s very clearly at a level much higher than our clothes being simply dirty. Even hobos would look pristine in comparison.

That being the case, our current 1st priority was bathing and laundry.

And yet, here we had neither a bathroom with hot tufts of steam, nor one of the three sacred treasures, the washing machine. No way we had em. The only place to procure sanitary water in this dungeon would be, that’s right, the fountain in a Fairy Square.^[3]

It was neither a bathtub, nor a shower, but should be described as a natural pool.

“...!”

From behind, the splashing sounds of water hit my ears. Futaba-san is, right now, right behind me, gratuitously exposing that plump body of hers.

I think, most of the guys from class would be like, *That fatty naked? yea, NOPE; blergh, someone get be a bucket* and raise their jeers but— *Fuh*, foolish plebeians. In the end, man cannot resist his desire. The desire, to see boobs that is.

But right now, the hero inside me, with a saintly spirit, he’s sealing away those wicked desires. To feast his eyes on Futaba-san’s that, that super-sized

bust you can't find even in big titkyonyuupornosAV, he's sealing that desire.

"Th-this is... perhaps my greatest trial yet..."

And for a brief period, like a middleschool boy in front of a sealed porn magazine in a convenience store, I tasted heart-wrenching pain and anguish.^[4]

"Momokawa-kun... I, I'm done now"

With Futaba-san's voice, my ordeal finally ends. In reality, it probably hasn't been that long at all, but an acute feeling of exhaustion drones over my body.

But I can't possibly display such a shameful appearance, and it'd be crazy bad news if she sees through my ulterior feelings, so I turn back sporting the face of a sage.

The figure of Futaba-san standing there was within expectations, dressed in our school designated deep blue gym clothes. It didn't have any unintentional look of eroticism. Even wearing gym clothes, the chest and rear is the default tight fit, so that may be considered an exception in this case.

Seems like she washed her head too. The always fluffy hair wetted in water had somewhat lost its volume, and gave an out-of-norm impression.

"Yup, we're lucky we brought the gym clothes huh"

"Yeah, I agree. Me too, if I didn't see Momokawa-kun getting it, I'd have left it back at the classroom"

Thanks to that, we can take off our uniforms with the assurance of spare clothes. My hypothesis that in a survival scenario it's better to have a 2nd set of clothes, has struck home with astounding success... but if we didn't have them, *Man, it can't be helped, we got no spares huh*, like that I could've seen Futaba-san in her underwear. I-it's not like I'm regretting it okay!^[5]

"Uhm, Momokawa-kun, if you'd like, I can do the laundry"

"Eh, you will?"

"Yeah, I can't really, do much of anything else"

Futaba-san's gaze lands on the Ointment A production set I spread on the ground.

Certainly, as a Shaman and in charge of creating medications, I have the need to get to work while we're resting at the safe area known as Fairy Square. Furthermore, I want to inspect all the new gear collected from Goma, and am thinking of finishing up any other miscellaneous tasks I can get done here.

So if she proposes to take care of the laundry, I'm more than thankful. With the premise of distribution of labour, I think it's fine to help myself to Futaba-san's good will.

"Thanks, I'll leave it in your hands"

"Okay! So uhm, Momokawa-kun... I'll do your shirt too, so take it off"

Actually I've already finished bathing in the fountain before Futaba-san. Though I say *bathing*, it's not like I got in there shoulder deep or anything.

This is also our drinking water, so not risking any pollution to the water, I had agreed beforehand with Futaba-san that we wouldn't put the body in. At any rate, even without such rule-making, we wouldn't dip into such cold water in the first place.

Thus the proper bathing technique here would generally be, wetting a towel and using that to wipe down the body. We had no bucket to pail out water, and had to make use of an empty 500ml plastic bottle.

Anyway, at this place, we could only manage washing off a minimum level of dirt. Luckily, both me and Futaba-san had brought along a sweat towel along with our gym clothes, so there was no situation of having no towel, or otherwise, shared usage.

Like that, having done my bath, I had changed into my spares... but I mustn't forget. My gym clothes, specifically the shirt part, was given to the Armor Bear. I clearly witnessed it making ribbons of my gym top with a single slash.

That being the case, what remained to my possession was a single pair of gym pants. Leaving my upper body exposed would be too unnerving, so reluctantly I put my dirty shirt back on, but if she'll wash it, then I need to take off.

"Yeah, alright"

With not an ounce of embarrassment, I take off my shirt and hand it towards

Futaba-san.

Myself being a man, having my upper half naked was not shameful. Well, exposing such a twiggish figure could be considered embarrassing in another sense, but it wasn't like I was a woman and would naturally form a handbra in this situation. I am often mistaken as a woman, but inside it's all raw, unadulterated man. A young man in highschool surging in pheromones.

"Y-yea..."

Nevertheless, if Futaba-san stares at my upper body with that much of a feverish gaze, even I'll get embarrassed.

Fuh, M'lady, does a man's body pique your curiosity? or some other line from a hardboiled dude won't be coming out of my mouth.

"Futaba-san, is there, uhm, something on me?"

Saying something like "Is there something on my face?" just made it even more awkward. *The hell do you mean something on you!* I thought, but then realized that under such an incomprehensible fixed stare of a girl, I can't help but ask it like that.

"Ah! So-sorry... Uhm, the scar on your neck, isn't, gone yet, I thought..."

"Eh, Ahh, you mean this"

O-oh man, just a bit more and, *Can it be, Futaba-san, she has fallen prey to my physique?* I'd have misunderstood. I thought there was no way, but yup, there's no way.

"Well it's not like it hurts anymore, it'll heal up one of these days, so don't worry about it"

This wound on my neck is from the time the rampaging Futaba-san bit onto me. She says she remembers what happened, and it's about this gentle girl, so it isn't hard to imagine she's terribly concerned about me, an ally, being injured.

With Pain Return, she got the same wound on herself, but thanks to Blessed Body it's been healed only on her end, is probably also making it awkward.

"I'm truly, sorry... There definitely, won't be a next time"

Finally, with a slightly clouded face, Futaba-san took my shirt and headed towards the fountain. She had no more words for me. No more words, for this gym pants only, undie-less me.

Ah, she's doing all the laundry meaning, under those gym clothes, Futaba-san's also, got nothing on!

"Sigh... on to the meds"

Dispelling the devil, for now , I went back to medication manufacture.

[1] It's that pun again, 天職 (vocation) 転職(change), both are said tenshoku

[2] Misogyny... I'm actually not sure. Probably refers to 1-dimensional characters you can't really respect, regardless of gender.

[3]A useless link, The other 2 treasures are TV and fridge. Think treasures = modern convenience~

[4] Being Momokawa is suffering ;_7 (lol)

[5]*baka, hmph!* the works... it's tsundere talk desu.

Chapter 26: Goma Loot

Let's check the gear.

We brought back all the Goma equipment we could from that T-junction of carnage. With both me and Futaba-san, we used the stretcher I once made to carry her, to bring back a decent amount. I quickly decided on which ones to take by briefly looking if they're usable, and upon coming back to this safe location, I took upon the talk of carefully sorting out which ones we'll be needing for dungeon exploration from here onwards.

"I say that, but all I've got here's dull blades and junk..."

Goma not carrying decent weapons, is but a well-known truth. Even for rusty knives, blades of iron would be their top spec.

Still, now when Futaba-san became a peerless Berserker, even these trashy weapons are better than being empty-handed. There's meaning in picking out ones even a bit useful.

"Futaba-san can probably handle something a midge heavier, hmm, but lighter ones should be better for speed... No wait, high damage should be..."

So I've being deliberation like that groaning *hmm*, but thinking about it, being able to choose weapons like this could be said to be quite a luxury. Especially for my type of people who likes min-maxing with weapons in games, there's a good bit of fun.

Incidentally, I'm here choosing Futaba-san's weaponry only because she has left it to me. Her take on it would be that she hadn't the slightest clue about these things. I mean, I can't say I'm any expert in real battle though.

"Kay, let's go with this"

Piling deliberation upon deliberation on my mind, I finally came to an answer.

First, the main weapon will be the axe she used just before. The handle being around a meter~3.3ft long, and furthermore, maybe because it's built for combat, the blade is on the somewhat larger side. Looks to be a genuine battle-

axe.

Comparing sizes and quality, the result was settled upon this being the closest to ideal size.

Next are the sub weapons. For this I chose a hatchet typically fashioned for chopping wood, and two simple single-edged knives. For the hatchet, the blade length would be 30 cm~12in, as for the knives it's 20 cm~8in I guess. There were many similar things but the deciding criteria here would be the low rusting. Adding on to that, the clincher would be the fact that these had sheaths as well.

Sheathes are essential when venturing with blades. Even gradeschoolers understand the dangers of running around with a naked blade. Though they're dirty and made of shaggy pelts, just having a sheath or not presents a big difference.

Finally, one more for emergencies, a small knife wrapped in cloth, I'll put it in her bag.

Futaba-san's equipment status: done. Next is me.

"Equipping myself won't be of much use though"

Maybe because of that mindframe, I didn't really care much and quickly finished choosing.

My main is a spear. Tree branch with a large knife tied on, hand crafted by the Goma. Compared to the merely sharpened branch tip I used to kill the Red Dog and Trap Goma, the one with a blade attached is clearly superior. What I fundamentally lack is physical strength, and though there was a surprisingly good-looking axe, I settled for the spear which was light and had better reach.

My sub-weapon, similar to Futaba-san, a single knife. This too had a sheath.

"Would've been great if I had bow or something long range"

No use demanding the impossible. And say I got a bow, without being an Archer, there's doubts whether I can handle something like that.

If asked to prepare a long range weapon from the items in hand, there's only stones. Using the pouches that the Goma hung at their waists, I'll go ahead and

gather some stones that look throwable. Maybe they'll come in handy at some point, and carrying around a few won't be cumbersome.

Now then, I've prepared two of these throwing-stone pouches, one for me and another for Futaba-san. But rather than these generic weapons, there's others to think about. Gear, or rather these should be called Items I guess.

First, starting with Ointment A, a variety of meds. The existence of wound healing medication is practically our life-line in dungeon capture, and the area where I can truly show my mettle.

There's probably more Fairy Squares dotted with some frequency, so I'll produce an amount on the premise that I'll be making more along that frequency. Thanks to beating all those Goma, small articles like pelt bags are aplenty, lots of room to store my meds.

Actually, amongst these meds, there's that narcotic included too.

I found some when scavenging off the Goma. Bags with that white powder. A number of them were carrying the item, so we have plenty to go around.

However, using this raw would make Futaba-san rampage again, and there's no telling if I can return safely from being high again.

So to safely make use of this drug, I'll use the Blueflower with it's antidote effect. Pertaining its usefulness in settling down the dependence factor and extreme high, I'm living proof.

Therefore, mixing this drug with Blueflower beforehand, inhaling once should make it usable while decently lowering the effects. In the case that Futaba-san goes rigid from fear, or even if you simply want to stop the pain, it has more than enough value.

I dub it Reagent X.

Having to use this would mean it's a situation of great crisis, so I'm praying that we never end up in something like that.

For our belongings, these would be the things worth mention. The rest would be, yeah, I cut up some of the Gomas' clothes into strips, maybe to use like bandage, and stored them in my bag.

Naturally, I don't want to use things worn by such filthy Monsters as is, and they should be the worst from a hygiene standpoint as well. This too, I chose ones that looked relatively cleaner, and sent them to Futaba-san along with the laundry for cleaning.

"Momokawa-kun, I'm done with the laundry"

As I was doing gear selection, it seems Futaba-san has completed her job.

I look to find the articles of laundry hung to dry. Amongst the Gomas' belongings there was rope, or better said, it's more like a kind of plant ivy, well we found something like that.

Tying these vines to the Fairy Walnut trees lined up on both sides, we get an impromptu clothesline. There's no wind here, and it's not like the laundry's been put through a dryer so it should take a while before they get dry.

"That soap, how was it?"

"I didn't get many suds, but a lot of dirt got out"

The thing I called soap, correctly, it wasn't soap.

According to the new updates in the information from the Note Circle, we were introduced to a plant that works in place of soap. ^[1]

I forgot it's proper name, but this natural soap plant, it's the size of a Fairy Walnut, and peeling away the blue husk reveals a banana-like white-ish interior. The appearance seems delicious, but there was a strong warning that it wasn't suitable as food. Even my Intuition Pharmacy was like, *You wanna blow bubbles and keel over, then have one*, so I definitely stopped all thoughts of trying it.

Anyway, the high amount of unique oil content in this white thing apparently works well in getting rid of dirt. Plus, this convenient soap can actually be found at a Fairy Square it says.

Searching under the trees as per the info, we certainly did find some. There's not as many as the Fairy Walnuts, but there's a decent amount scattered about. Seems like not all of these trees are of Fairy Walnut.

"Well then, let's look for those Mimesis Worms."^[2]

The convenient resources don't just stop at the Soap Fruits. Along with it, the Note Circle introduced us to another, this insect known as the Mimesis Worms. The proper name is redacted.

It's outer appearance isn't particularly different from a white caterpillar, but this insect sticks onto flora, or the ground, and there it makes a cocoon mimicking that surface. It won't become a chrysalis but will still make a cocoon. Anyway, the threads made for the manufacture of this mimicry, it could be called one of nature's mysteries, as it perfectly dyes in the color of its surroundings.

Implying, if you let this thing cling onto a torn area on clothes, it'll start making its mimicry on its own. Once the cocoon is complete, it's a simple task to take the worm off the clothes, and it'll look like a slight loose thread sticking out. Cut away that fragment of thread, and the clothes are good as new.

I personally have some suspicions concerning the existence of a worm so convenient for humans... but on this occasion, I'll thankfully make use of them.

"Ah, Futaba-san, you the type bad with bugs?"

"Nope, I'm totally fine with them. I've made food with insects before, and eaten them too. They're pretty good you know?"

I'd prefer not to though, insect cuisine. So that Futaba-san doesn't get in the mood to make food using insects from this dungeon, I may have to politely hint at something like "I kind of don't want to eat insects you see".

"Hu-huurmm, that a fact—"

My soulless reply was suddenly *Gukyu~!* interrupted by such a sound.

"Yup, let's have some food then"

"U, Uu, uu... Sorry..."

Naturally it was the sound of Futaba-san's stomach rumbling. That embarrassedly tearful expression looks much redder than when she was bathing. *What's the big deal?*, is my thoughts but that must be because I'm a guy with only a half-baked recognition pertaining the delicacy needed towards women.

“You took some Power Seeds, so it’s no wonder your stomach’s empty”

“D-don’t Momokawa-kun... I don’t need that kind of gentle follow-through...”

It’s true though, the part on the Power Seed’s calorie expenditure. No, quite serious here, if you use those you need to have food as soon as you can. Even if it seems fine, and you think it gonna be fine, and keep popping them in, at some point, it wouldn’t be strange to suddenly suffer from malnutrition.

Anyway, leaving the mending of clothes to later, we need some eats.

Well, the clothes are gonna take a while, so let’s have a breather. Ah, just remembered, I got a CalorieMate, want some?

“I do! Thank you very much!”

With a momentum as if she’d go dogeza, I was taken aback and was a beat late to reply.^[3]

“S-sorry...”

Before I could reply, Futaba-san’s sense of embarrassment from her own greed dyed her face red, and she said so as if wringing out the word.

“No, I don’t mind ok, really”

For now, so as not to further pile shame onto Futaba-san, I’ll cut the chit-chat and get done eating. My thanks to you Takashima-kun, your CalorieMate has been put to use as Futaba-san and my provisions to last another day, I’ll dine upon it graciously.

“Also, we should get our rest in while we can, and get ready... The area ahead, seems harsh”

The vigilance is totally called for. Since, as we go out from this Fairy Square, the dungeon goes into the biggest Forested Dome we’ve seen yet.

“Uwa-, Uwaa...”

The blatantly displeased groan of displeasure, is to be expected. I mean, I’m back at the closed space of Curse God Ruinhilde.

“Mine devotee, Momokawa Kotarou”

“G-ge-greetings, my Lordkamisama...”

In the bizarrely brightened empty universe-like space, stood the God who took the appearance of a Grim Reapershinigami and I. Me coming here means, it must be that I'll be getting a new Curse, but thinking about the damage from the previous times, I can't be 100% happy about it. I sincerely pray, please don't let it hurt this time.

"Ku ku ku, to have tamed the Berserker... We praise thee"

"T-thank you very much"

Berserker obviously means Futaba-san. I didn't think making her an ally could get so many points. Maybe God realizes how easy it is for a Shaman to get isolated.

"We shalt grant a new Divine Protection"

Don't let it hurt, don't let it hurt, please don't let it hurt, no seriously, I beg you my Lord.

"Reveal thine hands"

"Ye-, Yhess"

At this point, I'm practically almost crying. What is it this time, will it be tearing off the nails? Or is it the whole wrist? I know it's a dream but, gimme a break here.

Like that, as if coming to an understanding of having given up, I lift my hands towards Ruinhilde-sama and spread my palms as if I'd be receiving a ball.

The attack, isn't coming. Is it the teasing strategy?

"Know this. A Shaman dealeth not solely with death and agony"

On top of my palms, rests Ruinhilde-sama's own large hands of bone. That action itself, doesn't hurt. The feeling on my palms, is only one of chilled metal.

"Those hands, they posesseth the capability to further birth, new life"

"Uwah"

Ruinhilde-sama is likely in the middle of an important lecture, but I inadvertently let out my voice. At that moment, a lukewarm something, touched my palms... No, it felt as if the thing was sinking into my hands.

“But, ye mustn’t forget, that life too at it’s base, is but a mere curse”

I didn’t really get it. But the sudden drowsiness, marked the end of this dream.

Ah, I’m glad. It didn’t hurt this time.

[1] I’m changing Magic Circle on the notebook, to Note Circle... for obvious reasons. It’s actually much easier to say in the jap.

[2] 擬態蚕 (Gitai Kaiko), More specifically it’s silkworm, but I bit my tongue saying it so no.

[3] Dogeza → prostrating with head on the ground. I’m quite fond of word, so I’ll be using it instead of a localization.

Chapter 27: Mud Doll

Looking up, a ceiling so high it only somewhat comes into view, spread before my eyes is a gigantic Forested Dome. The exit from the Fairy Square was a wall, better said, it was like a small cave poking into a great precipitous cliff face. This magnificently vertical cliff extended to the left and right, the ends of which are out of visual range. Advancing along the walls like always, seemed quite the detour.

And spreading out in front, would be a densely packed lush forest. One could imagine hidden beyond that verdure, a torrential sum of Monsters.

But, scariest of all is the field that is known as forest. In underground passages, the view isn't obstructed, and detecting enemies is easy. You only need to be cautious around corners and near rooms. However, inside a forest, trees and other vegetation become an infinite supply of cover, and ambushes are facilitated all the more. Yet further, the Monsters that lurk there are ones that make the forest their home. Territorial advantage is fully on the home team.

Passing through even those small Forested Domes almost made my spine freeze over. To think we'd have to walk god knows how many kilometers through that kind of place, frankly, it's just depressing.

“—Right, let's just go”

Still, we advance. For survival.

Brilliant white light like that of the sun shines down from the extra-large light panels affixed on the ceiling. This place is bright like midday all 24 hours of the day. Thanks to that, it's fairly bright in the forest as well.

“I guess these Forested Domes, don't really change much”

“I think, they got the same type of plants. But it's possible we can find some awesome herb here, so let's check around the vicinity for now”

For me with my Intuition Pharmacy, a forest lush in flora is like a mountain of treasure. And in fact, it's because I found those two Redshrooms soon after I

was thrown into this world, that I was able to finish off the Armor Bear.

I'm sure, there's a bunch load of useful plants here in this forest, that are just anxious for us to find them. Shelving a modest bit of expectation in my heart, *let's get this Forested Dome capture started*— but before that,

“Wait a sec Futaba-san. I got granted a new Curse, so I'd like to try that out”

“Ehh, really!? That's amazing!”

If you ask who's amazing, it's pretty much Futaba-san who's actually made use of her vocation, but yeah, getting that kind of reaction from a girl isn't bad at all. It's hostess club customer mentality.^[1]

“Amazing or not, I won't know till I try it but... yeah, you shouldn't really get your hopes up”

I let her know just in case being incompetent as ever, and now I shall commence the experiment for the brand new Curse No. 5.

“Uhh first, you collect some earth”

The reason I proposed to test the new Curse as soon as we got here is primarily because the first condition was already cleared. Around here I can get my hands on all the earth I want, but in the stone built areas, its surprisingly hard to find. And just in case, we can run from here back to the Fairy Square lickety-split.

I squat down and concentrate on digging out the dirt. Futaba-san's standing right beside me on lookout, but I guess she's curious so she's occasionally peeking at my hands.

“Next, you add water and make mud”

The 500ml plastic bottle filled with water we planned to drink along the way, is all used up all of a sudden. It should be fine to get it refilled after. It's a pain though.

“Once the mud is made, let's now shape it into human form”

Taking the mound of mud, I knead it into parts like back in kindergarten. It's saddening that I have to start making mud balls after coming all this way in the dungeon, but I convince myself that this too is a necessity, and seriously build it

into a human shape.

It's not clay but mud, so it's impossible for it to have self-support like figure models. A head and limbs of mud laid on top of the ground like a relief is the limit. The size is more or less 30 cm.

"You've made it here, just a bit more. You can do it"

"Hey, Momokawa-kun, who are you explaining all this to?"

"Ah, please don't talk to me for a bit. This is the explanation flowing into my brain"

"S-sorry..."

Futaba-san finally retorted looking at me talking to myself like I'm explaining some children's toy, but I'd like her to understand than I'm not messing around here. Really this, if I don't speak it out while doing it, I feel like I'll forget the invocation procedure.

The aria is deeply engraved into my head but, it's likely, that this explanation is a one-off thing. I don't know the theory behind it, but it's designed annoyingly like this. Well, it's not like the steps are difficult, so I'll remember it if I do it once.

"Now that you've made a splendid human form, let's now add some of your blood"

Adding in blood, it's kinda gotten Curse-like. Maybe it's finally time to unleash, right here, the powers of a true curse. Getting a bit excited.

"Eh, b-blood..."

"I guess I need to cut my finger here. It's great we got the ointment"

Hii, goes Futaba-san as she turns subtly blue in the face watching me cut my finger, to the point I can't imagine she's the same Berserker who massacred all those Goma. This isn't like, one of those, *look I'm cute*, acts that girls do right?

With those light suspicions, I swipe the boxcutter over my left hand middle finger. And soon enough, a ball of fresh blood forms and drops land on the mud person. Huh, how much is *some* blood supposed to be anyway, I don't really get it... hmm, several drops should be ok.

“And then you simply recite the aria, oh, is that it for prep work?”

Leaving my fingertip’s first-aid for later, I prioritize invoking the Curse.

“Rise from chaos, bind in foul blood, stand on stained earth— Vile Mud Doll”[2]

After chanting the aria without break, the change starts.

The blood that had soaked into the mud without a trace, started rising and bubbling on the human shape. Me and Futaba-san both went “Uwah!?” inadvertently at the disgusting process.

Blood boiled and enveloped the entirety of the human shape— wait, this is clearly more blood than the amount I dropped, the hell’s goin’ on. Anywho, I don’t get the logic, but the human shape was now dyed crimson in blood, or so I thought or not, but this time, the bubbles of red all disappeared like water being sucked into the ground.

“...Eh, it’s over?”

I voice a doubt after around 10 seconds of silence, but just then, the human shape moved.

“Woah, this, it moved!?”

A voice of surprise is raised a 2nd time.

That which was a plain human shaped clump of mud until just now, stood up. As if slipping out from the mold on the ground, the Mud Doll mechanically rose to its feet.

Its form, was slightly deviated from that human shape that I had constructed, the head was strangely bigger, the limbs like that of an infant, like a 4 head-lengths distortion design.[3]

“W-wow... Momokawa-kun, so this is...”

“Ah, yep, you guessed it, this is the Vile Mud Doll”

Vile Mud Doll	A Puppet that moves to the will of its master. Absolute Obedience.
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For now, this is all I get for mental description. As always, it basically says

obvious things you can tell at a glance, so as for what this thing can do, or if it can use any special techniques or magic, all the important bits are left in the dark.

Also, it'll only move according to me, is what it said in my brain. *So like this, I can make a giant robot mud golem*, or something, at this point, I don't buy it.

"Ehm, so, how do you move this thing?"

This kind of thing, rather than voice command, having it move by thinking about it should be the standard... for starters, *start walking!*

"Wah, it's moving, Momokawa-kun!"

"Ohh, you're right!"

On this rare occasion where something actually went according to my expectations, the Mud Doll swiftly moved its short legs and started walking. It started circling around my legs. Seems like it'll keep moving until it turns to butter if I don't tell it to stop.

"Stop"

I said, and it stopped. It's unknown whether it heard my voice, but it's unmistakeable that my will is transmitted with something like telepathy. No, this Mud Doll doesn't have an ego so I should think of it like a radio controlled gadget.

Now then, how precise is this thought control method, this calls for a test. I say that, but what should I make it do? Hmm, thinking too deeply seems useless, so for now, I'll just try whatever comes to mind.

"Radio Calisthenics No.1"^[4]

As that hope-filled morning melody, a tune any Japanese countryman knows, resonates through my mind, matching the rhythm, the Mud Doll starts doing the Raise your Arms and Stretch your Back.

"And, one, two, three, four—"

"Woah, amazing, it's really doing radio calisthenics!"

The Mud Doll was different from some lazy brat, and performed the exercise

with proper modicum. I didn't have that clear of an image, but it correctly deciphered the information in my head, and moved with seemingly practiced motions.

"Yup, something like that"

"Ah, we're stopping?"

Futaba-san looks a bit disappointed. Doing all the radio exercises right here is a bit waste of time after all. Also, the 2nd exercise has some embarrassing poses so I don't really remember anything but the first part.

"Operation gets full points, but the problem is power, right"

"Yeah, it doesn't look too strong"

Exactly. This here looks to be as fragile as the appearance denotes.

I try touching it, and it's the same feeling of mud I felt when I was collecting it. Gaining any sort of special hardness, wasn't included.

"Anyway, let's keep walking together along with this. It won't put up much of a fight, but should be good for a lure or something."

Thereupon, We, along with the as per usual unreliable Curse-made Mud Doll, dove into the deep forest spread out before my eyes.

"Still, feels like we'd get lost if we go just a bit off track..."

Now, walking inside the forest, the sense of direction is all but lost. Everywhere I turn, it's trees, trees, trees... nothing distinguishable about them.

If we weren't on this animal trail, we wouldn't have a clue as to which way to go.

"Ah, wait a bit"

As I raise a voice to stall, Futaba-san immediately comes to a stand still. Having awakened as a Berserker, she would no more follow along shivering while gripping onto my clothes' corners, but would boldly walk ahead and lead the advance. With her sub-weapon of the hatchet in one hand, she cut away the foliage obstructing our route, looking at it from behind she seemed quite sturdy. In fact, her back was wider than twice my own.

Why I stopped the advance was for none other than harvesting.

The discovery being Redshrooms that are known to pack enough power to kill an Armor Bear, and the other thing that was evidently expended, the Shamdelion. And gleefully, like those granpas and grannys that venture out to pick wild edibles, I began harvesting the poisonous mushrooms and inconspicuous weed-like herbs.

I won't be letting Futaba-san help out here. Her role is look out. It wouldn't be strange if the head of an Armor Bear pops out suddenly from the bushes over there.

In her place, the one being my picking partner is this Vile Mud Doll, but its efficiency could only be described as lacking.

"Hmm, this is a serious power deficiency"

Picking a single Redshroom or a single bundle of Shamdelions took all its might. I guess as long as the body itself is mud, the max strength would be up to the point where the mud wouldn't break.

I'd like to praise it for using its whole body, trying to extract the items with maximum effort, but then, me using the boxcutter to cut them out would be leagues faster.

"Ok, this is enough. Let's go"

After finishing up some collecting not too far from the animal trail, finally, I tie one of the strips of Goma cloth to a nearby tree. It's a just-in-case sign for backtracking.

After that, I guess another hour passed. Similar to the forest way back when, this place also had its ups and downs, large roots on the way, claiming up, going under, it wasn't that easy of a route. So though I say one hour, it's not like we got that far.

The average walking speed of a Japanese is around 5 km~3.1 miles. But that's the case when it's a flat road with no obstacles, not a forest where Mr. Bear can pop out anytime, so our speed is probably half of that or less.

"Around here, let's take a break"

I’m kinda out of breath, and so decided to stop for a bit.

Fortunately, the Mud Doll has enough speed and stamina to match our pace, and right now, it’s beside me sitting with knees up as if in standby mode.

On the other hand, Futaba-san looks fine. I could make a guess that it has something to do with the Berserker vocation.

The Berserker’s three Novice Skills are listed below:

Berserk Body	A body, knowing only slaughter
Blood Boost	Blood boils forth, to fight with no end
One who Hears	Hear the voice from afar. Reject not, rampage not, listen to it with certainty [5]

The trouble is, the one and only hint that that can give us a clue as to what the effects of these abilities are, the descriptions coming to mind, every last one of them was like something that someone like I, from the literature club and afflicted with chuunibyou, would write down, a collection of indecipherable flavor text, and that, was fatal. This set of phrases, are practically useless.[6]

What part and how much does Berserk Body strengthen? What amount does Blood Boost increase the blood. What’s the rate per hour? Is there an upper limit? There’s way too many questions.[7]

And here comes the worst, this mystery skill called One who Hears. This, in the first place, I don’t even know where to use this. Exactly what is this Skill for, with what kind of timing do you activate it, I don’t get anything at all. *Voice from afar*, literally whose voice is this! Get me the VAvoice actor/actress dammit!

Anyway, leaving aside my complaints to the literary hack of a Berserker God, it’s about that Berserk Body that incurs an effect on Futaba-san’s physical strength. I think, it’s likely somehow strengthening her, but Futaba-san herself doesn’t seem to understand much about it she said.

Futaba-san bashing around the Goma, clearly looks stronger than she was before, is my impression, But maybe it’s her original strength wielded to perfection with the supplement of courage.

And so, whether or not this Berserk Body is supplying the stamina so that she wouldn't get tired after walking for a while, is also something I can't be certain of.

Well whatever it may be, the current Futaba-san has the super-strength to pop off Goma heads bare-handed, so let's just keep it there. Whether this powerup is a result of growth and augmentation of base status numbers, or because of some Skill, the origin, in this case, doesn't really matter.

"Momokawa-kun, are we going ahead?"

"Hmm, shouldn't we? There hasn't been any Monsters, maybe we can pass the whole forest like this..."

It's somewhat worrying. I'd have thought we'd get into a fight or two on the way, but the route was peaceful.

"How's the Compass? We're not off track right?"

"We're good, the direction and the trail is still matching"

I've been frequently confirming the direction with the Magic Compass. Since its direction was spot on along the animal trail, our hike has been relatively easy.

With that thought, I think it's fine to go along the animal trail until it diverges from the direction for today.

"No, maybe this trail, it's one that someone else cut open before us"

"Maybe it's Class Rep and the girls..."

"Could be Higuchi too"

As both of us inadvertently voiced out names we have some history with, the air got a little awkward. But as a possibility, there's no denying it. Higuchi gang and Class Rep Team, there's no doubt that both are ahead of us.

"A-anyway hey, Futaba-san, after this w—"

I opened my mouth as if to imply that we shouldn't give a damn about those people, but right then, Futaba-san abruptly stood up.

We were taking a break, tree trunks to our backs, sitting opposite to each

other. Futaba-san was now standing up, her brows knit, and though not to the level of her rampage... her face got scary.

Wait, what, did I maybe, say something bad? Was reminding her of Class Rep that much of a landmine?

“Ah, Um, Futaba-san?”

In her silence, towards me, she takes a step. Her hand draws the hatchet at her waist.

Eh, no way, for real. Wait, please wait, let's talk, let's talk ok? Let's separate from the weapon, and the distance too, let's calm down and talk it out Futaba-san.

Of course my thoughts don't go across, and Futaba-san swings her hatchet.

“EH, WAI—”

Faced with such a sudden attack, I had no time to prepare for death, and the blade of the hatchet made a dull sound of severing meat.

“It's fine now, Momokawa-kun”

“...Eh, what is?”

As I timidly open the eyes I shut hard the moment the hatchet swung, I find, smiling with a single bead of cold sweat running down her cheek, her face before my eyes.

A beat later, I realize. Doesn't hurt. Nothing hurts, and there's no blood. What Futaba-san cut, wasn't me.

“It's a big snake, look. Even if there's no poison, it'll be bad if something like this bites you”

Fuu~, she lets out a delicate breath, and from right beside me, Futaba-san takes the snake, whose head was split with the hatchet, into her hands.

Uwah, didn't notice at all. Even when this big a snake got right into my breathing space.

“T-thanks... saved me there”

Attuning to the sense of danger of something secretly closing in on my body, I

feel my face dripping in sweat.

This is a forest in another world. Not only Monsters, there's myriads of other dangerous animals inhabiting these parts. There's nothing strange about a snake of two crawling around, and there's not helping an amateur to survivalism like me getting closed in by one such animal.

So, I can really die here just like that, once again apprehending such a fact, I shivered in fear. No, seriously, thank you Futaba-san.

"Fufu, you're welcome"

Replies Futaba-san with a cheerful smile like an angel, while taking the head-split snake, and uses the hatchet to land another strike. With a sound of slashing, the snake's head drops.

Futaba-san kicks the snake's detached head like a pebble, and as it disappears beyond the thicket, She grabs the tip of the neck portion of the rest of the body, and then proceeds to tear off the skin with all her strength as if trying to destroy it. Seeing her smooth movements, I'm in mute amazement as, contrary to expectations, the snake was now cleanly skinned.

"Ehm, Futaba-san, what're you doing?"

"This snake, I thought we could eat it maybe"

Its skin smoothly slid off, Futaba-san suspends the snake onto a nearby branch like a length of rope. Dark red blood started dripping out from the severed area on the neck. This must be that blood draining thing.

"Eh, we're, eating this?"

"Eh~, you won't eat it?"

The hell, she's acting like I'm the one who's strange for not wanting to eat it. In the first place, this could be a poisonous snake, and trying to eat it is like, too much of a challenge or...

"A plain old snake. It's a weakling and there's no poison, so you can eat it just fine... Err, ah, this snake, looks like we can eat it, that's good"

"Really? Yay~"

Intuition Pharmacy went off, and again, it was this careless kind of explanation, which confirmed that this snake was suitable as food. With definite proof that we can eat it, Futaba-san is absolutely thrilled. Looking to the snake corpse dripping in blood. Way too wild for a highschool girl from current day Japan.

“Futaba-san, so, how do we eat this”

“Hmm, there’s no choice but roasting I guess. We don’t have salt or pepper, and without the seasoning it won’t taste that good... but we should still get in the meat content”

“Aah, now that you mention it, we’ve only been having walnuts haven’t we”

We can believe the information that it’s packed with nutrition, but no matter how you look at it, only those won’t be able to maintain your fitness of body. We’re not squirrels. We need our proper helping of protein.

“Yeah, the path ahead of here, should take us a while I think. So, it’ll be great if we can eat our fill”

You’re damn right. And there aren’t any cracks in that perfectly constructed line of argument, but then a roar was unleashed from Futaba-san’s rotund middle, and it became a big fail.

“So Futaba-san wanted to have meat this much”

“Don’t say iiiit!!”

While regretting that rude slip of tongue, I thought that from now, I should employ Intuition Pharmacy to also see if the Monsters we kill are edible too. Well, even if they are, I wouldn’t put my mouth anywhere near a Goma though.

[2] 汚濁の泥人形 — Odaku no Doro Ningyou — Vile Mud Doll. The Vile part has the meaning of pollution, contamination, corruption *etc.*

[4] Example, I guess people know Radio Taiso if you’ve seen enough jap media. In fact, it’s even a big thing in Re: Zero (lol).

[5] ... this is hard. I’ll say this first, I’m not sure about the romaji

pronunciations. So ok, 狂軀 — Kyou Mukuro — Berserk Body. The first part is straight forward, Kyou ~ Berserk, but the second part, Mukuro means dead body, but I based it to be similar to Blessed Body, so the end result is like that. Next is 増血 — Zou Chi — Blood Boost, Zou is increment, and Chi is blood. Finally, 声を聞く者 — Koe o Kiku Mono — One who Hears. This one's just... anyway, literally, one who hears the voice, I shortened it for aesthetic reasons, I don't think the nuance is too different, its a pretty out there name in the first place. The description for this one is iffy as well.

[6] I'd think you know what chuunibyou is. I could call it being colorful of mind...

[7] So he says Berserk Body strengthens, sure there's some truth to it but it's also a pun/hearing discrepancy since there's Kyou in Kyou Mukuro and Kyouka (strengthen). It's likely that he heard the names and descriptions from Futaba, so the miscommunication is valid?

Chapter 28: Frog of the Lake

“Ah, that’s—”

After Futaba-san hunted that snake, we ended our break, and have been advancing for a while now. And all of a sudden, the trees cleared up, and our field of view widened.

“Wow, it’s a lake”

Just as Futaba-san expressed kind of like a tourist, over there, was a lake right in the middle of the forest.

“From closer, it must be really pretty”

Reflecting white light, the glittering water surface was calm, and the pristine water was so clear you could see the bottom, I could tell that much standing back here. From up close, it should be even more illustrious. It’s a sight I could honestly compare to a tourist spot.

“I’d prefer to not get too close though. We haven’t got a clue as to what kind of aquatic Monsters are in there.”

As we’ve secured a practically infinite supply of potable water in the Fairy Square, there’s no reason for us to approach the lake.

“Let’s keep away from the lake, and go around”

There’s no other choice. With Futaba-san as vanguard, and keeping the lake to our right, we make towards circling around it.

“...Huh?”

The problem, appears all too soon.

“What happened, Momokawa-kun?”

“The Compass, it’s still pointing to the lake”

After going around the perimeter quite a bit, I nonchalantly check on the Magic Compass, to find this happening.

“Probably a coincidence. Let’s go, a bit more”

But, my naive hopes are shot down fast. The Compass continues to point to the center of the lake.

I'd have thought it was telling us to go to the opposite bank, but no matter how far we advance, it keeps pointing at the lake. Even though I can't see any path there.

"The Note Circle going haywire... isn't, possible right..."

Futaba-san can't be blamed for saying that. In fact, I thought the same thing at first.

"I don't know if the Note Circle is bugging out or not, and right now, we've got no way of confirming that either"

If this compass function of the Note Circle is really going funky, then our dungeon capture will come at a complete standstill right here.

"I guess, we need to steel ourselves and look into the lake after all"

This isn't the great outdoors but a mysterious dungeon chock full of crazy gimmicks. That being the case, there's no reason for there *not* to be a hidden path inside the lake. If possible I'd like there not to be some annoying mechanism that tells us to bring back a key, or a stone tablet, or Key Item, or some bullshit puzzle or riddle to find the password or something.

"Let's look in the water, see if you find something"

And so, we put on our vigilance, and with caution, bring ourselves closer to the lake. Looking at it anew, it just looks like a beautiful lake. In the clear water, I could find schools of fish swimming around.

For a time, as if tracing back our path, we slowly circle along the lakeside.

"How is it, Futaba-san, see anything?"

"Hmm, No, not rea— Ah"

Looking as if she found something already, Futaba-san raised her voice and pointed.

"There, something like a building is under the water!"

I focus at the pointed direction... but yeah, can't see anything. It's not as bad

that I'd need glasses, but seems like Futaba-san has me beat in the eyesight department. Or maybe it's Berserk Body strengthening her vision.

"Kay, let's go"

Of course, I don't mean inside the water. We're relocating to a place where I'll be able to see the structure Futaba-san saw. Fortunately, it's not too far. Or more like, it's right where we started from, came out of the forest and arrived at the lake.

"Woah, how did I not notice something like this..."

That thing appeared so clearly inside the lake that I unconsciously leaked out such an impression.

At a glance, it looked to be a bridge sunken in the lake. I say sunken, but the depth to the path was only around 30 cm. If I can afford for these flimsy school-designated indoor shoes to get soaked inside out, then it's an easy walk across.

The width is around that of a 1-car lane, so there's plenty of breathing room. If we walk along normally, as long as the bridge itself doesn't collapse, we won't miss our footing.

This Waterline looks as if it spans the whole lake, going straight across. I can't confirm if it really ends at the other side though.^[1]

(TN: Waterline = underwater path, a uselessly coined term cos it makes things nicer.)

"Hey, are we, crossing this?"

"I don't want to, to be honest, but this is what the Compass is saying you know..."

Apparently, this is the correct route. We just need to resolve ourselves, and march on.

Thus reluctantly, I put one foot into the water and then.

Bubbles suddenly start rising. Doesn't look like any natural phenomenon. It was undeniable proof of something in the water, something spewing out air.

"Something's there!? Get back!"

Futaba-san, despite her large body, does a sharp back-step, while I on the other hand, spin around in feverish haste and pathetically run like a madman. As I get my huffing body near to the forest and rest my hand on a tree, with a piercing sound of splashing water, a great shadow springs out from the lake.

“Uwawah, a frog! It’s a big frog Momokawa-kun!”

On top of the Waterline, as if blocking all traffic, exactly as Futaba-san said, there sat a big frog. Yeah, really big. I mean, this guy can probably swallow me whole, that big.

Overall, it looks to be bigger than even an Armor Bear. But it seems to have glossy skin like its Earth-born brothers, so it’s likely softer-skinned than the Armor Bear, and blades will work on it, I hope.

Its figure, short and stout, the surface of its skin was rugged with warts like a bullfrog. I can only hope it doesn’t spit any poison.

“Futaba-san, quietly. Maybe it isn’t aiming for us”

“Ehh, but this frog, it’s aiming for Momokawa-kun see!”

“Eh, really!? You can tell!”

“I can! Ehm, it’s like, it feels like that!”

Is this another of the Berserker’s powers? In the three Novice Skills, there wasn’t anything like Sense Presence, so is it like a Hidden Status or something? Anywho, right now, I should believe her words instead of doubting them.

Which would imply, that we have no choice but to fight.

“Futaba-san, up for it?”

“No problem! It’s like a bullfrog, so I bet we can eat it!”

No, I’m not asking about your cooking hobby... but yeah, Futaba-san looks like she can fight this, so let’s count that as an affirmative.

“Sic ’em Mud Doll! Entwine its escape, with weaving hair—Blackhair Bind!”

With the usual Blackhair Bind to seal movement, this time I combo with the Mud Doll in hopes that it distracts the enemy even a bit, and send it running as an advance troop.

Honestly, there's the chance that this giant frog won't even notice this flimsy little 30 cm Mud Doll, but a try's a try. Crossing my fingers here—

“Uwah, that could've gone better...”

Picking up a branch-cum-spear from the surroundings, the brave *Private Mud Doll* rushed ahead. However, the giant frog was on the Waterline. The depth being just around 30 cm. The moment it charged into the lake, it went fully submerged in water, and like what happens when you put mud balls in water, the Mud Doll became a black stain and dispersed. Leaving only the spear-cum-branch bobbing up and down the water surface.

The hell, so useless. Even on my end, my connection-like thing with it popped out of existence, showing that the curse was totally extinguished.

“It's on you Futaba-san! The bind won't hold for that long!”

“Yeah, count on me!”

Waiting for Blackhair Bind to be invoked, a beat after the Mud Doll's meaningless assault, Futaba-san sprang forth full power wielding her battle-axe.

Beyond her, still bulking on the bridge, sat the frog. That fixed state, was probably not because of the insignificant bundles of hair grabbing onto its log-like forelegs.

The meager amount of Blackhair aiming to seal such a large creature's forelimbs, looked painfully unreliable.

But, for the current me, this is my maximum level of restricting ability. Speaking of, this Curse, it's gonna levelup and get stronger, right... I'm getting some late-game anxiety here.

“Plunge into permanent swelter, and curse the body— Red Fever!”

And as I cast my final support technique, the only subtly effective Curse No.1, Futaba-san closes in enough to get into attack range.

“YaAAAAAAA!”

Raising a lovely yet gallant roar-like cry of female pitch, she aimed for the frog's crown and swung down her axe with tremendous power.

Right then, the giant frog jumped back with agility surprising for its body size, and dodged the axe's trajectory.

To no surprise, my Blackhair Bind had no restrictive effect at all. Or more like, can frogs even do back jumps, structurally speaking?

The hell is this, fuck! I cursed internally with various grievances, but then, "Uwah!?"

In front of me, a wet, revoltingly pink mass of meat was closing in.

When I realized that, that was the long tongue of the giant frog that flew out from its gaping large mouth, my feeble body had already been wrapped up and captured.

"Momokawa-kun!?"

Without being able to make any form of resistance, the moment I tried to swing my spear, I was getting dragged towards the frog's mouth. That strength reeling me in, forget someone like me, it wasn't something a mere human could resist.

Being pulled in with what can be appropriately called monstrous strength, I cut through the air leaving behind my scream, and the scenery.

There wasn't any revolving lantern like effect with the memories of my life flashing by, just thinking "Ah, I'm dead", I simply stared at the frog's gaping mouth like a fool.

The large mouth was glistening with sputum, it somehow looked glowing red. As if, it were the entrance to Hell— I was about to think, when the lid on that Hell closed shut. The red, was dyed in black.

"BuwaAAAAAAA!?"

I experience the split-second feeling of slamming into cold water, and at the same time, the shock of being thrown down rolling from a bike roaring down a hill slope. Which translates as, I fell onto the Waterline with the same inertia I had while being reeled in by the frog's tongue, and rolled around a bunch of times.

Falling in water meant that it didn't hurt so much, but I almost drowned a bit.

Slamming in there like that, I was made to understand that humans really can drown in a mere 30 cm of water, as I anguished in the stinging feeling of water invading my nostrils.

“Momokawa-kun, are you ok?”

“S-somehow...”

As I shake my drenched long-haired head like a dog, I look around the vicinity to find Futaba-san vigilantly holding her axe. And crying, *Ogheghee!*, the figure of Great Frog looked to be in pain, splashing out green blood from the tip of its tongue. [2]

(TN: The frog is described multiple ways, until it settles at this line as Great Frog — Dai Kaeru.)

It appeared, that Futaba-san barely made it as she severed its tongue, and prevented me from being swallowed whole. I see the logic behind it, but this girl who was a normal highschooler just a few days ago, performing such a masterful display of superhuman technique, is certainly worth merit. I don't know what's scarier, the vocation Berserker or her own talent.

Anyway, that saved me. That I could carefreely declare so, isn't so surprising, since in the next moment, the battle came to a quick conclusion.

The first to move was, having recovered from the pain of its tongue severing, the Great Frog. It flew into a mad rage, and hoarsely crying out like a genuine frog, spitting saliva everywhere, it charged.

With its folded up hind legs, its jump, the identity of a frog, was not to be seen, as it stomped along on the Waterline on all 4 limbs without the slightest care.

Facing that, Futaba-san stood strong waiting, her wide back seemed as if it was declaring it would protect me. But no matter how much Futaba-san completely obliterates the average young woman's height x mass, there's a clear difference from the true monster class size of the Great Frog.

A scene replicating a traffic accident involving a truck crashing head on, right before the moment of such an impact, the battle-axe shone.

“Hmph!”

Exactly what kind of event that surmised, someone like me with my totally average eyesight wouldn't catch any sight of. Truly, a speed surpassing the limits of vision.

However, I clearly witnessed the resulted attained by such an event.

The Great Frog that was rushing, was pitifully sent flying.

Looking at that frog-kun, I get a sense of pity.

“It's the Knight's Skill Repel!”

That's right, it's that very same ability we tested out when I had just made Futaba-san my ally, I tasted this same Repel. The result: it was the same as mine, as the Great Frog was now pitifully struggling belly up, lying on top of the Waterline.

Still, even against a Great Frog, it invoked at such pinpoint timing... no, that it sent the creature flying in a full-frontal attack, would be the most surprising aspect.

“YaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

And then, Futaba-san, not missing that massive opening of an animal overturned and madly flailing away, this time truly, dealt the fatal blow.

The large axe blade pierced into the soft-looking white skin covering frog's neck, ruining the nice scenery with a shower of green blood.

“Uwah, sorry Momokawa-kun, looks like, we maybe won't be eating this frog after all”

Tahaha, Futaba-san laughed wryly after her complete victory, and with that, the duel over the Waterline came to its end.

[1] Waterline = underwater path, a uselessly coined term cos it makes things nicer.

[2] The frog is described multiple ways, until it settles at this line as Great Frog — Dai Kaeru.

Chapter 29: Transfer Circle

After Futaba-san brought down the Great Frog with her overwhelming Berserker strength, we thought to waste no time and aim ahead.

The Magic Compass went like, *Over there!* and pointed to the middle of the lake, in other words, the circular plaza-like area we reached upon arriving at the end of the Waterline.

“But like, there’s nothing here...”

The trouble is, it’s just a plain old open space here. Like the Waterline, it was 30 cm deep under water, and spread out like a stone-paved floor. Structurally, it had the feeling of a giant pillar rising from the bottom of the lake with us standing right on top.

I let out useless groans as I try to search for a gimmick or something. From the fact that Natsukawa Minami was making use of traps, we can pretty much conclude that this dungeon is riddled with contraptions of all sorts. Since the Compass was so obstinately directing us here, there’s just got to be something.

I say that, but we’ve got zero hints here. Neither is there some switch-like thing to slide open some hidden door, nor some kind of epitaph telling us to solve a riddle.

If forced to say, there’s the point that the stone floor has a Magic Circle-like thing drawn over it, which would be the only clue-ish detail. But, that may as well be a part of its decoration too.

I roll up my sleeves, and plunge my hands into the water, touching my fingers to the Magic Circle spreading out below my feet.

“Yeah, no use after all”

The sensation on my fingertips, was that of hard stone, and of slippery moss growing on top. I don’t know how long this place has been underwater, but this environment is perfect for the moss to culture.

Thinking as such, I was gliding my hand over the surface, when an sudden

feeling of tenderness caught on my finger.

Raising my arm out from the water— it felt as if my heart stopped.

“NuwaAAAAAAAAA!?”

On my fingertip was, an elliptical black creature dangling down. Like a powerful suction cup, its mouth-ish part was clutching onto the tip of my index finger.

Yup, it was a leech. A big fat leech. It’s a whole frickin’ 15 cm leech dammit.

“Aaa!?”

I started flailing around my arm like half crazy, but it wasn’t only big, but had quite the suction power as well, and wouldn’t come off so easy. During which, the leech was increasingly sucking out more of my blood, in its semi-transparent, I saw red fluid collecting from the outside.

Black Bloodline	Blood that— ^[1]
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(TN: 黒の血脈 — Kuro no Kechimyaku — Black Bloodline. Eh... I don’t know~)

“GyaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

Just now, I think I saw something like a Curse description, but right now I’m busy with a giant leech gulping away at my blood, so I wasn’t in a state to read into it. There’s no feeling of pain, but getting such a gratuitous display of my blood draining into its half transparent body, it was frankly so disgusting I want to cry. No wait, I’m crying a little already.

“Haa... haa... g-got it off...”

In the end, I succeeded in detaching it from my finger by trampling it underfoot. It wasn’t my intention, but I kinda put too much weight on it and it got squashed under my shoes. Like a red haze, my sucked-out blood dispersed into the water.

“Mo-Momokawa-kun! Are you alright!?”

As I finished making my one-man commotion, my partner, the *Berserker* Futaba-san stomped in with her large body and swinging breasts.^[2]

(TN: Berserker is said in English here, like Baa-zaa-kaa)

“I’m f-fine... or rather, looks like there’s some big leeches on the floor, so be careful okay”

“E-Eeeh!?”

Her eyes rolling around, Futaba-san splashed around her feet in the water. Making sure there aren’t any icky blood-sucking organisms around and on her legs, she ended her dance.

“More importantly, what about the core?”

“Yup, I have it here!”

While I was checking out the circular plaza, I had requested Futaba-san to go collect the core from the Great Frog. As expected of Shiramine Academy’s cooking club ace, it was child’s play.

She was displaying a full-faced smile as she held out the red crystal. No doubt, it’s the core. It’s the 2nd time I’m seeing it. First being the stolen one from the Armor Bear.

Thinking back, it feels like the Great Frog’s one looks somewhat smaller than the Armor Bear’s. Is it related to the Monsters overall strength after all? Both are pretty similar in size, but the Armor Bear has to be stronger in terms of battle prowess.

“Thanks. But on my end, I’m not too far from where I start—”

I attempted to report the results of my unfruitful investigation, but then, a sudden change came about.

“Uwah, what the, the Circle’s shining!”

As if it was waiting for Futaba-san to get here, the engraving spreading around our feet radiated red. Seems it wasn’t just a design choice, but a real Magic Circle.

“Wh, wha-wah, what do we do Momokawa-kun!?”

You’re asking me, but I know exactly zilch about magic, so I don’t know any countermeasures either.

However, I noticed that the core in Futaba-san’s hand is also glowing as if

matching the Magic Circle's luminance.

"Look, the core! Whatever, just throw it!"

"Eei!"

And then, Futaba-san quickly threw away the all important core. Drawing a clean arc, just before plopping into the water, as if it was literally a flashbang, the core released dazzling red light.

"Uwah—"

Vision instantly lost. I reflexively closed my eyes, and sensed the flash of intense light on the other side of my eyelids. Makes you think, if I open my eyes now I'll definitely become blind.

As reasoned, the time I next opened my eyes, would be after another 30 seconds passed. Only after I made sure that at least those intense rays had gone.

"Mm... Futaba-san, you okay?"

"O-ok—"

Turning to the voice, Futaba-san's large figure blurrily enters my view. I confirm that we're both alright, but right after, I notice the change.

"Huh, wait... It's not the lake"

As my flickering vision adapts to the surroundings and returns to normal, I notice the complete change in scenery.

"Ah, it's a Fairy Square... right?"

Yup, I could agree immediately, since right in front of me, there stood the very symbol of security and relief in this dungeon, the cute statue of miss Fairy on the fountain.

However, both me and the one who raised question, Futaba-san too perhaps, were bewildered by the slight change we saw in the Square as a whole.

The size is around the same. But, how should I say it... the green is lacking. It used to feel like a nature-filled public park, but this place completely feels indoorsy. There's only a pair of Fairy Walnut trees on both sides, and the

blooming flowerbed isn't to be found. Instead, there's a few planters poised around the fountain as if to compensate.

It's kinda, really dreary looking.

"Oi oi, this for real, we're set Nishiyama, somebody came!"

"Hold it, careful Hirano, what're we gonna do if it's Higuchi or something?"

As I heard voices, my pulse immediately increased from tension.

Shit, there's someone— no, from the voices and words, it's a guy and a girl, 2 people; there's Hirano-kun and Nishiyama-san here!

"Ooh, it's, Momokawa huh... and also, Uooh, Futaba-san?"

"Ah, them? That's good, it wasn't someone weird"

I look to find, unmistakeably, the figures of my two classmates.

The one laughing wildly, standing tall in his gym clothing, was Hirano-kun. My seat number is 19 and his being 18, he sat in front of me right from the very start of 2nd year 11th grade, and though we're not really friends, I at least know his name and face. Incidentally, because of that wide back of his, I had quite a bit of trouble following the blackboard.

The other, in sailor fashion, Nishiyama-san, also isn't someone I'm particularly close with. More like, I have literally nil close relations with any girl, but let's leave that matter aside right now.

Nishiyama-san is of average build and height, not of any outstanding appearance, and wears glasses. She could be considered a plain girl, and wasn't particularly a loner either. She had her friends in class, and I recall seeing her in a chatting normally with her group during breaks.

They're harmless students who had been living ordinary school lives. But now, in this severe dungeon survival scenario, we can't let our guard down with anyone.

Anyway, these two don't look like they're going to start indiscriminately attacking like Higuchi— but, I'm still on alert.

Reason being, they're a 2 person team, and here's the me and Futaba-san

combo. In other words, right here once again, there came that cursed number, the number 4.

“S-sup, hello there...”

I desperately try to cover up my vigilance with a wry smile, and return a greeting.

Now, will these two become ally, or else, enemy. I personally would prefer it not to devolve into killing each other, but I can only pray my thoughts are answered.

[1] 黒の血脈 — Kuro no Kechimyaku — Black Bloodline. Eh... I don't know~

[2] Berserker is said in English here, like Baa-zaa-kaa

Chapter 30: The Hirano-Nishiyama pair

“Hey, Momokawa, Futaba-san, help us beat the Boss, I’m beggin’ ya here!”

As his first series of words, Hirano-kun came to us with that.

“Err, by Boss you mean?”

For the moment, it seems like he isn’t bent on attacking us, so I try probing by returning a question.

“A Dog, it’s a dog man, a big version of those red ones! It’s like, super fast, and dodges Magic too, we seriously can’t do a thing with just me and Nishiyama”

“Uh huh”

Seems like a chief-like Monsters for the Red Dogs is the Boss Hirano-kun’s talking about, but it’s not like we’re in a game so something like Boss Monsters give a feel like, *the hell’s with that*.

“Am I right to think, Momokawa-kun, you don’t know about the Boss?”

Perhaps inferring from my face that seemed not to fully accept the premise, the glasses wearing Nishiyama asked. For now, let’s quietly accept my ignorance.

“You’ve been transferred here, so I’d have thought you beat the Boss”

“Do you mean, that frog?”

“Ah, so you had a frog. In our case, it was a Skeleton though”

From there, roughly according to Nishiyama-san’s words, it appears that this Boss is the Monster that rests in the room with the Magic Circle you use for warping to other areas.

This dungeon isn’t fully connected via physical passages, and in specific spots, there seems to be space-time displacement, in other words, warp enabled Transfer Circles set up. Furthermore, it’s decided that this warp room will have a large class Monster inhabiting it, and the mechanism’s set such that the

Transfer Circle won't activate unless you beat it. To be point-blank, you need that Monster's core to work the Circle so all paths lead to beating the Monster anyway.

"First time I'm hearing it, all of that"

"Seriously? It was written plain and simple though"

"I think, the info getting to us has individual differences in timing"

At some point before I realized, my Note Circle was updated with the info on Goma. So it could be that, depending on the vocation, different amounts of information come in, it's a possibility.

Anyway, rather than pondering on this kinda-useful but maybe not Note Circle info, I need to prioritize forming a pact of cooperation with these classmates.

"Err, So uhm, you mean to say, we can't progress without beating that Red Dog Boss"

"Yes exactly, simple right?"

"Any alternate routes? Or what about secret passages or loopholes?"

"This floor is constructed in a simple box shape, so the farthest room is the Boss room any side you pick" [1]

(TN: Box isn't accurate, it's more like an ellipse with two pointed ends as we'll see a bit later.) According to Nishiyama-san's explanation, right after exiting this Fairy Square, the path splits to the left and right. And going either way, you go the same distance in a monotonous path until the paths connect again. Finally, as if placed exactly opposite to this Fairy Square, you find the Boss Room.

The paths on both sides are connected to many other rooms, but don't lead into any other passages, and apparently, a fixed number of Skeletons come out inside.

Hmm, maybe they're being made somewhere else, and then sent to all the rooms with Transfer Magic? Well, there's no way Monsters would just pop into existence in real life, so one could think it's accomplished through the power of

magic.

“About hidden passages, sorry but with our vocations and skill sets, it’s impossible”

“You gotta be a Thief or somethin’ for doin’ that”

A Thief’s detection Skills are something I’m well aware of from hearing about Natsukawa Minami from Futaba-san.

And, these two must also know of a Thief’s Skills since they mentioned it.

Implying, either one of them is a Thief, or they know one, I can think of those 2 possibilities. Right, let’s take this chance to probe them.

“Thief Skills huh, you know any details?”

“Y-Yeah, I mean, right...”

“Hirano-kun, we have to tell them. I mean, if we don’t, they won’t see just how scary that Boss is”

You’re right, said a paling Hirano-kun, as he collected his thoughts and began talking.

“Actually, we also had Itou”

In other words, Itou Seiji, it must be him. There’s no Itou among the girls so there’s no mistake.

He was like me, the type that doesn’t stand out in class. As for his club activities or friend circle, I only ever rarely spoke to him so I don’t know.

“So you mean, Itou-kun was a Thief”

“Yeah, thanks to that guy, we cleared the first place hella easy”

“He could find traps, and even open Treasure Chests”

“... Treasure Chests? There’s those too?”

Ridiculous, it’s become more and more RPG than IRL! as if reading my thoughts, “No way Momokawa, you don’t even know about Treasure Chests”, both their expressions seemed to say.

“Well, I guess you gotta be a Thief to find those chests huh. Anyway, I don’t

really get it but they really exist, Treasure Chests.”

“Inside, you can find things like mana recovery potions, and if you’re lucky, even weapons. Look, this wand I’m using, we found this in a Treasure Chest too”

Looking at which, she’s holding a 50 cm~20in long thin branch-like stick with a big green marble-like stone fixed to the tip, “I’m a wind attribute wand!” it gave a strong impression as such. If I saw this in modern Japan, I’d think it’s a quality cosplay accessory, but come to the otherworld, this must be the genuine article.

“Hee~, pretty cool... but, Itou-kun not being here means...”

“Well, uh yeah, you guessed it”

“It’s when we first encountered the Boss, see. In the floor before this, it was really easy, and there’s also that fact that we got a bit cocky...”

Looking at their pained expressions, they’ve faced real human death, and understand the cruelty of the dungeon, is the impression I get.

“But dude, we can’t just stay here right. The Boss is scary as hell, but if we can’t beat it, we can’t get outta here”

Of course, with the area set up so simple that there’s no use looking for other routes, it’s the same as saying we’re stuck here. Thanks to the Fairy Square, we won’t starve right away, but sooner or later we’ll reach the limit no doubt.

“So we’re beggin’ ya man, all 4 of us workin’ together, we might just do it!”

“Yeah, well, that’s fine and all but...”

At this point, I’m not denying we have to beat the Boss to progress. What’s bothering me is, what comes after.

“You two, you already know, about how only 3 people can escape right?”

“Y-yeah, that a, well, yea...”

Hirano-kun makes a slightly awkward face. Once you know this utter despair-inducing number restriction rule, it’s a truly natural reaction.

“Momokawa-kun, I don’t think it’s the right time to think about that. And with only 3 people, don’t you think we won’t progress in this dungeon at all?”

I see, Nishikawa-san makes a valid point. Even the Armor Bear, it's too dangerous a Monster to challenge it with just three people. As we go through the dungeon, I can't think there won't be powerful Monsters lying in wait. No, if we go with the premise that the whole dungeon has a Boss Room system like this place, then the deeper we go, there will definitely be tougher Monsters stationed.

There's no way I can disregard the merits of gathering more than 3 members.

"But, there are guys who won't think like that. They won't cooperate, that much is still ok, but guys who like to kill first ask questions later... could also be there"

In fact, I can attest to it. Case in point, there's Higuchi who made no pause in deciding to kill me. But I don't need to particularly mention that. I need to be very careful how much of my info and experience I reveal to these two.

"Think a bit, if we have more than three on our side, they can't attack us so easily right?"

Power in numbers. Adding to that, us having vocations make it so that our strength is likely more than meets the eye. Even with a gathering of frail-looking girls, it could be that actually, all of them can blast out fire balls or something.

"So you're saying, we prioritize conquering the dungeon, and leave thinking of escape for later?"

"Yes, somewhere along the line, we could even find something other than that Divine Gate. Also, look at us, aren't we strong? We can probably make it out of the forest outside too"

Finding fault... or opposing these hope-filled words, it's too early for that. Certainly, we do know too little about this otherworld. What we can do, what we can't. It may be time to not narrow down, but look into increasing our choices.

"Got it, I'm sorry for the nonsense. For now, let's work together, and aim for crushing that Boss"

"Ooh, thanks a bunch Momokawa!"

“Thanks Momokawa-kun, we finally got some hope!”

We laugh, and somewhat exchange handshakes. For the time being, we’ve established a cooperation pact, and the mood is calm... but Futaba-san has been silent for all this while so I’m worried.

“... Momokawa-kun, you’re fine with this?”

As I glance towards her, she brings her face close and asks in a whisper.

“For now, it’s better to work together. But... if the time comes, be ready”

It may be obvious, but I don’t wholeheartedly trust Hirano-kun and Nishiyama-san yet. I can say I agree with Nishiyama-san’s opinion. But while saying logical niceties on the outside, they could be secretly planning to trick us, it’s a possibility I can’t deny.

It’s a sad story, but if they betray, I can’t really do much. If on top, even Futaba-san betrays me, then it’s really over. A Shaman with no allies, is much too powerless.

“OK, leave it to me, Momokawa-kun”

I’d given her the obvious warning, but Futaba-san smiled and replied powerfully.

“Hirano-kun, Nishiyama-san, from me too, best regards”

Along with Futaba-san’s bright smile and exchanged greetings, our jolly party of 4 was formed.

“Well then, first is self-intros, or rather should I say vocation-intros?”

“Oi Nishiyama, that stuff, we can just figure out with some Skeleton hunting right?”

“Ah, right, that’s right. You could say it’ll be much more clear that way. So Momokawa-kun, Futaba-san, we’d like to go fight some Skeletons, and have everyone see each other’s powers, is that alright?”

Now then, it’s a bit sudden, but seems like it’s come to the time where I must reveal my vocation.

Well, there’s no way we can fight the Boss without everyone having a grasp of

each other's abilities. So long as we're cooperating, we need to lay out our powers, to the bare necessity that is.

"... Got it, let's go"

[1] Box isn't accurate, it's more like an ellipse with two pointed ends as we'll see a bit later.

Chapter 31: Skeleton

Coming out of the Fairy Square, it was the same old stone-paved passage greeting us. But different from the same old was the point that it was much cleaner. Rather than new, it gave the feeling of not yet deteriorated.

The stone walls didn't display a single crack, even moss hadn't grown. Even the light panels illuminating the passage from the ceiling, seemed to glow somewhat brighter.

The path draws a loose curve, so the Boss Room at the end isn't visible, all in all the perspective is quite narrow. But as long as the ceiling or floor doesn't suddenly open up, or we don't get suddenly warped in the middle of the passage, there's likely no risk of surprise attacks.

"Hirano-kun, I have some idea, but the Skeleton, what kind of Monster is it?"

"They're uh, you know, just bones. Well, Itou's the one who started calling 'em Skeletons though.^[1]"

(TN: Skeleton is said in English, and Hirano described them as ... a skeleton (骸骨).)

Seems like it's none other than that stereotypical Skeleton. The pure white collections of bone rattling along as they attack, they appear frequently in RPGs and fantasy genre movies... but thinking back, it's my first time encountering a non-living Monster. Somehow or other, all the one's I've seen could be called extensions of creatures found on Earth.

"Yeah, you'll get it when you see it. And they're just small fry so relax"

I'm not too reassured with Hirano-kun's frivolous smile and wild laughs, but from the fact that they're stuck on the Boss, Mob Monsters wouldn't be any problem.

"Ah that room, there's a Skeleton, look"

Nishiyama-san who was walking alongside Hirano-kun reported a discovery.

Looking there, from an entrance to a room along the passage wall, a white figure gaited along. The distance is about 30 meters~100ft.

“Woah, it really is a Skeleton”

That is, it was so perfect a skeleton, there isn't any other description. As if the educational model in a biology lab started moving, it was a walking human skeleton.

It doesn't have clothes, but it's armed.

Lightly grasped in its bony hand, was a wooden club. At around 50 cm, the club was of rough make, but not too thin or too thick. That reminds me, the clubs equipped on most Goma looked similar. There's a chance they beat these Skeletons and plundered the item.

“Doesn't look like it's noticed us”

“Yeah, they won't notice till ya get closer”

“So shooting my Magic to beat them is easy as pie see”

I see, it's like a badly made Monster AI.

“It's the first for Momokawa and Futaba-san, so I'll show you the ropes”

How generous. No matter how strong Futaba-san's gotten, it's better to avoid challenging on first encounter. If we can observe its movements, she can fight easier too.

Reason for refusal is nowhere to be found, so *at your convenience*, I replied in agreement.

“What about me?”

“If y'insist, have the first one. I'll get the two behind.”

The Skeletons entering the passage from the room, number three. There's no particular sign they're cooperating, it's more like a wandering zombie, they're aimlessly roaming around. One was facing here, and the other two, towards the direction of the Boss Room.

“OK. I'll be going ahead then, since I'm a Wind Mage.”

With a light intro, Nishiyama-san pushed out her wand. Her wand tip pointed,

practically announcing that it was about to shoot Magic.

Thinking of, it's my first time seeing Attack Magic. I've heard all about it from Futaba-san, but getting to see first hand, the staple in fantasy known as Attack Magic, it's kind of exciting.

Eh, Red Fever? Who's that?

“الرياح قطع ش—Aer Sagitta^[2]Wind Arrow”

(TN: Aer — Air in Latin I guess)

She quickly muttered something in a mystery language, and right after, the green ball on the tip of the wand let out faint light.

With that, leaving behind sharp winds, a whirlwind of glittering green ran through the passage. The emerald wind I saw for a split-second, drew an arc with a form similar to a curved blade.

Then, the blade of wind danced true to its aim, scoring a direct hit on the wandering Skeleton. With a dry clang, as if they took on a powerful slash, the Skeleton's ribs went flying.

Must have been a quite a blow. The Skeleton's spine bent back so much it seemed to almost snap, and as if the force was too unbearable, it fell backwards. Falling with a shatter, its movement completely stops.

With the splendid one-shot killing of a Skeleton, I regain an appreciation of the convenient thing known as Attack Magic. Also, a bit of envy. *Shit, if only I could do attacks like that...*

“A'ight, be a back in a bit. Get a good look at my abilities as a Swordsman”

Completely unaware of my ugly jealousy, Hirano-kun donned a confident smile and named his vocation. In his hands lay a double-edged longsword with a steel blade. A precious partner he scored from a Treasure Chest being its origins.

“Woah, fast”

I had no other comment seeing the sword-wielding Hirano-kun bolting off. Leaving behind only the rubbery sounds of his shoe soles clashing with the stone paving, Hirano-kun's fairly large figure shot out like an arrow.

“It’s called Quick Step. The effect is as you see”

I see, so that’s the speed boosting Battle Art, Quick Step. Movement boosting moves, if it was an RPG, there’s a big chance they’re useless. I mean, no player wants to waste a turn just to raise evasion rate and maybe increasing the chances for a critical. [3]

(TN: Change: Martial Art → Battle Art)

However, in real life, boosting movement, in other words, being able to run crazy fast, gives a tremendous advantage in combat. At the very least, if it was an average person, even if Hirano-kun came at them from straight ahead, they’d have no way to cope with his current speed. It’s not so fast that my eyes can’t follow, but it kinda doesn’t feel like a human running with that kind of speed. Even world class athletes I’ve seen on TV aren’t as fast. I wonder what the km/h is.

“Natsukawa-san was even faster you know”

Leaks Futaba-san as if talking to herself. Perhaps even with the same technique in name, there’s differences per vocation. Well, it’s most likely something to do with individual differences though.

Natsukawa Minami was our Shiramine Academy’s Track and Field Ace. If it’s the sprint, there’s no one with more talent than her.

“UoOOOOOOOO—”

Before I noticed, Hirano-kun had closed the thirty meters and had the Skeletons at swords reach. With a roar, he unleashed a full power overhead swing.

On their side, the Skeletons had noticed their friend has been defeated and were slowly turning to it. The existence of the quickly approaching enemy did not have time to enter their mental faculties.

“—BreakGreat Gash!”[4]

(TN: 大断 — Dai Dan — Break, it’s not too complicated)

For an instant, the sword seemed to slightly shine. The instant phantom glow passed, and a shrill noise echoed. A hit.

One Skeleton was cut from skull to pelvis. A moment passed, and the clump of bone was separated left and right, it rattled, and powerlessly crumbled.

A splendid strike. But one more enemy remained.

That Skeleton finally showed a proper response. Aiming for the opening created when Hirano-kun swung his sword, it greatly raised its club.

“Heh, saw it miles away!”

True to those composure-filled words, as if perfectly foreseeing the Skeleton’s monotonous attack, Hirano-kun bent down, dodging the club’s swing.

“Well duh, no problem for Foresight”

What a show off, that guy, says Nishiyama-san somewhat coldly.

“No but, seeing it and then even evading is pretty amazing”

“Momokawa-kun, please don’t say those words to him. You do, and he’ll definitely get a big head”

Nishiyama-san’s wryly smiling face looks, what is it, just like, like a girlfriend who gets just about everything about her idiot of a boyfriend, it gives that kind of composed impression.

“—Booyah! Got ’em good!”

Oops, as I was raising suspicions towards their interpersonal relation, Hirano-kun had cut down his 2nd Skeleton.

Slipping through the enemy’s attack with Foresight, right after, he rode Quick Step’s speed to circle behind. Speed so overwhelming, as if it was saying, *Ya gettin’ sleepy champ?* as the Skeleton couldn’t react at all.

Then it was a simple task of driving your favourite technique into that defenceless spine.

With that, Hirano-kun finished off the Skeleton safe and sound.

“Good work out there”

“Yeah, this stuff, it’s pretty much just warm up!”

Ha ha ha, he laughed as Hirano-kun returned in great humour. For us from the

peanut gallery, seeing the Swordsman's brilliant show of technique, well, it's satisfactory I guess. Even the way he put the sword back in its scabbard on his belt gave quite an elegant impression.

"And, how was that?"

"Ah, yup, I more or less get Skeletons now. Also, you two look like you're making good use of your vocations, pretty strong I say"

"You flatter me dude. I mean, I haven't even got any new Skills yet"

Which would mean, that Break, Quick Step and Foresight he showed us, should be all the abilities he has.

As for me, yeah, leaving out the lucky Armor Bear subjugation, I did attain that new Vile Mud Doll.

Of course, this must have some factor of individuality too... but yeah, maybe experience fighting Skeletons won't really amount to much.

Nevertheless, they could become convenient ragdolls, or I guess bone-dolls to throw attacks at. At the least, they'll be useful in testing out and getting used to various powers.

"Even though Nishiyama learned new Magic really fast man"

"Just say how you were scared at first and we only used my Aer Sagitta to beat them"

"Haa, I wasn't scared a'ight! And right now, Skeletons are easy as hell!"

"*Yipes, them bones man, they're bad mann*, tell me you didn't forget those tears"

"Never said it! Also, forget that, bygones are bygones dammit!"

They're fighting but they sure get along, I thought as I was watching over, but then *Gahah*, Hirano-kun noticed my gaze and took a critical blow. Were my eyes that lukewarm?

"A-anyway, once we beat the Boss, I'll be getting a new Skill for sure"

"Yup, for sure"

No I'm not lazily replying, I'm pretty serious here.

Leaving the special case of Futaba-san's class change to Berserker aside, the Class Rep group, according to the story, seemed to attain new Skills pretty normally through fighting. That means, the Boss, if we can take down a Monster even this Swordsman and Mage pair couldn't, we'll be getting new powers for sure.

"Nishiyama-san, what other Magic can you do?"

"Eh, the other ones aren't much though. Like letting out strong wind around me, or like making slightly high jumps using wind—"

The former has the name Aer DressWind Garment, and looks to be a sort of Defence Magic. Releasing strong gusts for a meter centering around the caster, it'll either blow away an enemy closing in, or at least, hold it back temporarily. Light long-range attacks like arrows or stones would also be repelled or bend off trajectory.

With some concentration, she can apparently hold it for a minute or so, and I think with more practice, it could become a solid defence... but it seems like Nishiyama-san herself hasn't used Aer Dress much, so her mastery of it hasn't risen.

The latter is Aer FollowWind Floater, a movement boosting, no, it's Support Magic I guess. Creating an updraft around the caster, her jumps get a slight boost. However, rather than upping jump height, say if you fall from a high place you can get a smooth landing, it seems more useful in things like cushioning a fall.

I don't know if you can remain calm enough to cast Magic during a free fall though. And as such, this one hasn't been used too much either, the current Nishiyama-san wouldn't be able to handle such a situation either. [5]

(TN: The Aer stuff is all romanized by author so I'm keeping those.)

"But that one, her new Magic, is pretty damn strong"

"I mean, sure Aer BlastTempest Edge has a good bit of power... but the chant is so long, if it's moving fast like that Boss, it'll never hit. Not to mention, one shot and I'm spent^[6]"

(TN: 風連刃 — Fuuren Ha — Aer Blast (Tempest Edge) ... I'm kinda making this

up here, but the kanji name doesn't matter anyway~)

Finally, perhaps thanks to hunting all those Skeletons with Aer Sagitta, she attained the new Attack Magic, the Aer Blast.

The Invocation time for the aria, is around 10 seconds. In the world of ruthless battle, every 0.1 second counts. One can experience the tumultuous anxiety of a 10 second lag simply by playing a high speed action RPG and trying to fight with a skill with around 10 seconds of cooldown.

To add, one shot of it gets you as tired as with three shots of Aer Sagitta... in other words, mana exhaustion.

A one-shot all-or-nothing High Magic. Using this practically in battle, would be quite a gamble.

“Just think though, one shot of this, and that mutt's done for”

“It won't hit, that's the problem stupid”

Well she's not wrong. In a game, you could Save & Load as many times as you want until you get that hit, but reality clearly doesn't work that way. If she uses Aer Blast against the Boss Red Dog and misses, then taking the exhausted Nishiyama-san and escaping from the Boss Room becomes even more risky. It's not the kind of thing we can leisurely challenge multiple times.

“Then like, we can stop it movin' so it hits and—”

“If you could do that, you could just kill it with your sword stupid”

“Anyway, I understand about Nishiyama-san's magic, thanks. It's at least reassuring we have a one-hit kill technique”

It seemed like the two would start fighting again so, half serious, half confounded, I speak to cut in between them.

“Now would be, Momokawa-kun and Futaba-san, it's your turn right?”

“Wanna wait till Skeletons come out? Or we could pick a room and look?”

“I'm curious what's happening in the rooms, so the 2nd option I guess... Futaba-san, is that alright with you?”

“Yup, no problem”

From her agreeable response, I sense a somewhat forced smile coming from Futaba-san. *Hmm*, she's making sure to be vigilant of those two I guess.

Since it's favourable to get along at this point in time, we shouldn't behave as to invite any discord... she understands that, and is displaying a cheerful atmosphere at least on the surface.

If she isn't high from the drug, Futaba-san is clearly not an idiot, nor is she a musclehead, I think. So, instead of me telling her to get along, we should just continue like this until she opens up naturally. If all four of us work together to beat the Boss, at the very least, we'll gain some trust between us.

"A'ight, let's go"

With Hirano-kun's nonchalant call, we once again begin walking the passage. First objective being, the room where those three Skeletons came out from.

Naturally, a game-like, Monster corpses turning into light particles, leaving behind item drops and modest sums of gold, isn't a phenomenon that passed, and outside the entrance, the bones were littered around. With a glance, we can tell there's no core to be found in these Skeletons.

"*Hmm*, nothin' in there"

Hirano-kun entered the room so unguarded it's like, *Oi oi you alright?*, and came out to report the non-existence of enemies. The room here doesn't have a door, but a simple opening in the structure. You can see inside just walking past, but need to enter to check the corners.

Even if Skeletons were lying in wait, clubs readied, beyond both sides of the entrance, Hirano-kun wouldn't be done in with a group assault of that level.

Well, looking at their behaviour, I doubt Skeletons have the intelligence to use traps or ambushes. But arrogance is fatal. These kinds of Mobs, if they get a Boss character to lead them, they can suddenly become elite troops too.

"Momokawa, you wanna take look inside anyway?"

"Ah, sure thing"

As I was meandering over things, I reply kind of like an idiot, and step into the Skeleton-summoning room with safety guaranteed.

Yup, nothing there indeed. There's only stone walls here, the room is around the size of a classroom. Nothing more, nothing less. The light panels on the ceiling shone down adequately, making it all too obvious that there's nothing strange to be found here.

"Have you guys ever seen where the Skeletons come from?"

"Nope, never... Oi, don't tell me you plannin' on waitin' till one comes out?"

"I'm not that bored"

That being said, we move to the next room. With rooms this deserted, even if there was a hidden door or something, without a Thief's detection skill, it'll be impossible to find. Looking around would be a waste of time.

"Yeah, other rooms're pretty much the same as that last one though— Oh, hold up"

Progressing through the passage, as we reach the 2nd room, Hirano-kun calls out again.

"We're in luck, Skeletons straight ahead"

As I follow Hirano-kun and peek into the room, sure enough, they're in there.

This new room was around twice as big as the last one, and at the center stood three stone pillars. Behind the right interior pillar, as if hiding itself, a Skeleton... no, two of them, were vaguely roaming around.

As usual, they don't look like they noticed us. Big chance for a preemptive strike.

"The floor's all yours"

In accordance to Hirano-kun's words, said as if he was requesting us to fill-in for classroom cleaning duty, Futaba-san and I challenge our first Skeleton subjugation.

"Futaba-san, you alright with the usual?"

"Yup, if you can tie the legs, leave everything else to me"

Futaba-san returns a strong reply. Or rather, she nonchalantly left out Red Fever there. Well, it's not an immediate effect Curse, so it's pretty much a

waste of mana anyway, so that's fine.

"Momokawa-kun and Futaba-san's vocations, what are they?"

Off we go, but before that, we need to let them know our vocations. On their side, their vocation and abilities have already been laid bare.

But we can't go being too frank and reveal everything here.

"I'm a Shaman, and Futaba-san is a Warrior"

I'll keep quiet about the class change for the time being. Being a Berserker doesn't necessarily mean Futaba-san has gone insane, and there's no outward change either. It's probably a special exception to the rule, but letting their hopes rise because of that would be problematic.

"Let's do this"

Detailed explanations come later. Let's first beat the Skeletons and give them a demonstration.

"Entwine its escape, with weaving hair— Blackhair Bind"

I step into the room and take the initiative. From the shadows near the pillar where the Skeleton is wandering, suddenly, a bundle of weed-like Blackhair gushes out. Wriggling in a gross manner like tentacles, the hair tightly latches onto the bone ankle.

"Now!"

I call out, and with that Futaba-san swings up her axe and— I thought, but she's just standing beside me, and doesn't seem like she'll run ahead anytime soon.

"Err, Futaba-san, what's wrong?"

Her suddenly becoming unwilling, doesn't seem to be the case. Futaba-san is on alert, and glaring straight at the Skeleton.

She wasn't replying, and lets go of her weapon that is the axe. She takes her now free right hand, and thrusts it into the Goma pouch hung at her waist.

"— Ei!"

Along with that lovely voice calling out, I hear a powerful hum cutting the

wind. The next moment, a dry shattering sound echoes loudly.

“... Eh?”

When I noticed, the Skeleton’s head was gone. Wait what, Futaba-san, when did you suddenly become able to use Attack Mag—

“Yah!”

Next, the 2nd one’s cranium shatters. It burst away so cleanly, one could argue there was a bomb implanted in there beforehand.

“I’m done, Momokawa-kun”

We present the hero.

Indeed, since I was standing right beside her, I came to understand how Futaba-san finished off those Skeletons. It’s nothing complicated, she was just throwing stones.

I’d given her a bag of throwable stones thinking they’d at least be used as farts, but they suddenly became one-shot kill projectiles. The Berserker’s strength has me in awe yet again.

“Woah, Futaba-san, that was friggin’ cool...”

“You’re sure Futaba-san isn’t a Pitcher right?”

Their surprise isn’t unreasonable.

“We can totally beat the Boss with this right!?”

“Yeah, I think this can work”

Nevertheless, her awe-inspiring power had come across in that performance. The reception is highly positive.

It may be a bit too optimistic, but I feel like we can at least take down a Boss now.

[1] Skeleton is said in English, and Hirano described them as ... a skeleton (骸骨).

[2] Aer — Air in Latin I guess

[3] Change: Martial Art → Battle Art

[4] 大断 — Dai Dan — Break, it's not too complicated

[5] The Aer stuff is all romanized by author so I'm keeping those.

[6] 風連刃 — Fuuren Ha – Aer Blast (Tempest Edge) ... I'm kinda making this up here, but the kanji name doesn't matter anyway~

Chapter 32: Practice part.1

With our vocations done being introduced, for the time, we decided to head back to the Fairy Square.

“Maaan, beating Skeletons without even a weapon, Futaba-san’s like, super strong? No wait, you have some uber Skills right?”

It sounds like a bout of pure-hearted curiosity from Hirano-kun, but we need to be careful responding.

Just before, we didn’t expressly reveal out Skill set. But pertaining our techniques and magic, we need to let them know what we can do.

“Actually, Futaba-san also doesn’t know anything other than the Warrior’s three Novice Skills”

I signal Futaba-san with a glance, but well, don’t know if she got it, but anyway, *leave this one to me*, I endeavour to explain in her place.

“Eh, you for real?”

“There’s one called Blessed Body which I think increases her power”

“Hmm, Blessed Body huh”^[1]

(TN: It is here that we get the pronunciation of Blessed Body ~! It’s Keitai. Incidentally, this also means phone if written differently.) Obviously, I’m lying. But since we’re going so far as hiding the Berserker part, we can’t reveal Berserk Body either. Well, it’s a fact that we still don’t know if that one is the one granting power to Futaba-san.

“And the other are Foresight and Repel”

“Repel? You mean she knocks away attacks?”

“Yeah, something like that. With the right angle, the enemy can stagger and fall, and it can also work as a counter”

It could overturn even that Great Frog, so it should blow away any small-tier Monsters. If it’s the Red Dog Boss, it should work, depending on its size.

“But man, with that Blessed Body thing, she can keep powered up all the time right? Isn’t that like, too good? Like, it’s a Rare Skill right?”

“Hirano-kun’s not stronger or faster without using Skills?”

“Yeah, none of that happens unless I’m using a Battle Art”

I see, that’s why this always active Passive Skill must look convenient.

“But look, Futaba-san doesn’t have any attack moves, so there’s no real trump card there. If we’re talking about damage, your Break looks much better.”

“Looks like it has its demerits too”

The current Futaba-san is reliable, but depending too much on one thing is never good.

“By the way, It’s just my guess but Momokawa-kun’s Shaman, it doesn’t have any Attack Magic does it?”

Urk, so she went for that... I mean, of course she would. Even I think I should be honest here, otherwise we won’t make any progress.

“Yeah, my Shaman can’t do any attacks. Frankly speaking, it’s pretty weak”

“Uoh, damn dude”

Hirano-kun says in plain-to-see dejection. She didn’t comment, but Nishiyama-san also has a difficult look.

“My Blackhair Bind that can restrain the enemy is the most useful one right now”

“Anything else?”

“The next most useful would be Intuition Pharmacy. I can make medications with it”

“Ooh, we finally got a Healing Skill!”

“But there’s the bottleneck of materials, and as far as I’ve seen, this area doesn’t have a single herb, so you can’t count on it much”^[2]

(TN: I guess he means the area outside the Fairy Square.)

“*Hmm*, how effective is it?”

“That I can guarantee. After all, Futaba-san once got a fatal wound, and my treatment worked wonders”

“For real, that’s great bro! We only had that 4-leafer for recovery, it was pretty bad man”

“Yeah, with this, if we fight the Boss and get a bit injured, it should be alright”

From their reactions, that 4-leafed clover herb introduced by the Note Circle is hard to find a lot of. At a glance, those planters in the Fairy Garden didn’t have any either.

It was the same with the Class Rep team, they’re having a hard time with recovery measures. On the flip-side, because of that, a Shaman like me can come into play.

“I also have Red Fever that induces a slight fever, and a flimsy Vile Mud Doll among the rest.”

“Eh, slight fever? What do you mean?”

“Please don’t ask”

Yeaah, these few Curses won’t help at all in our efforts, so please spare me the questions. More like, please just forget about them.

“Finally, there’s a Curse called Pain Return, this one, it returns damage to me back to the attacker, so careful not to misfire alright”

Otherwise said, *don’t backstab me, y’hear*. My attack power may be zero, but I’ll take out my killer 100% of the time, in a way, it’s the ultimate insurance.

It’s mostly useless on enemies that gang up like Goma, but it’s great against human allies. Anyone would give preference to their own life. Also, most people aren’t likely to use slave-like underlings like Higuchi. Well, even a dumbass like Masaru won’t make the stab if he knows he’ll die.

“I-Is that right. That one really is curse-like”

“Long as there’s no attack, it won’t hurt a fly”

Nishiyama-san backed away a little, so I added the comment. Plainly taking

distance like that, in and of itself, kinda hurts.

“Anyway, with this team, we can pretty much take care of the Boss right?”

“Stop right there, don’t tell me you’re planning to go there now right? We need to plan this out and... look, you don’t want what happened with Itou-kun happening again right?”

“Yeah, I get that”

From their conversation, it seems their first time challenging that Boss was a mostly no-plan charge. They did say something about getting in over their heads.

“So for now, should we have a battle conference?”

“But like, so first, Momokawa can be on restraining, and the rest is me and Futaba-san hack-and-slashing away at the Boss, with support from Nishiyama. Then, with luck, we cut the legs to stop it moving, and finish with Blast right?”

Hirano-kun’s plan is full of holes, but considering each of our vocations, there isn’t really any other arrangement.

“So what kind of attacks does the Boss do? We need to think of countermeasures too”

“Dude, it’s just a big dog”

“By big dog, he means around the size of a lion you can find in a zoo. Seeing it up close, there’s a good bit of pressure”

Lion-size meaning, it’s at least smaller than that memorable first encounter of mine, the Armor Bear... But, that doesn’t make it any less daunting. A Red Dog big enough to surpass large dog breeds, it’s damn scary.

“Ah right, it gets worse, the thing breathes fire man”

“Eh, seriously? Around how much?”

“Pretty big, like them fountain fireworks.”^[3]

(TN: Here’s a Video. It actually says Dragon Fireworks but in English it’s fountain I guess...) “No wait you, it was clearly bigger than some fireworks remember?”

“That, please elaborate”

“Hmm, let’s see—”

According to Nishiyama-san, though it’s not like a full blown flamethrower, the Boss still lets out intense flames. When there’s sparks emitted from its clattering fangs, the next moment, flames gush out with great momentum.

Is it shooting fire with magic, or maybe letting out flammable gas and then igniting that, at this point, it doesn’t matter.

“Isn’t it pretty dangerous for Hirano-kun and Futaba-san who’re supposed to get close?”

“Yeah but, were Swordsman and Warrior, so there’s no choice right? We’ll be looking out for the sparks”

Vigilance with focus on evasion. Saying so is great and all, but is that alright? In a game, the Monsters only move according to the AI they’re programmed with. Especially before big attacks, they’ll do some pre-set behaviour. That’s how the player deals with it. If they can’t, they can continue over and over again, so even an idiot can do it eventually.

“Anyway, maybe you could douse yourself with water before. Also, my meds can probably handle burns... but if it’s too severe, you might be out of luck”

“Got’cha, I’ll make sure to dodge”

There’s not a lot of pre-work we can do. In the end, we’re mostly relying on our *Player Skills*.

“Did we miss anything?”

“Hmm, not really, no. That thing moves like it looks, just like a dog. You know, those police dogs chasing after criminals, you’ve seen those on TV right? It’s like that, really fast-paced and all”

“Honestly, that there’s the scariest thing. I can barely run away with Quick Step, and Nishiyama’s far away too. But Itou... it was bad. He was knocked down once, and turned into a bloody mess”

“Eh, you mean, instant death?”

“Nah, he was alive. And, I tried closing in to save him, but by then, it was gonna blow fire, and Itou was in the way, so we couldn’t use Attack Magic either”

“And in the end, we couldn’t do a thing... and just ran away”

Under those circumstances, plus due to negligence, they lost a comrade and returned utterly defeated. But them making it back without major injury can be considered more than lucky.

“*Hmm... So, that happened...*”

The thought comes to mind, *maybe Itou-kun was betrayed by these two*. However, from their talking about how helpful a Thief is in dungeon capture, he shouldn’t have been someone you can so easily cut away.

As for that Boss battle, I should just look at it like they just lacked the power.

“So, what do you think? After a break, wanna head to the Boss?”

“No, Me and Futaba-san want to practice a bit more with Skeletons, so can you guys wait some?”

“There’s no problem with that, but will you two be alright alone?”

“If there’s only Skeletons, we’ll be fine. So, let’s go Futaba-san”

Saying that half-forcefully, I stand up.

Actually, practice isn’t the main reason. The prime objective is, yes, I have things I need to talk about with Futaba-san, alone.

“... Futaba-san, you’re pretty cautious of them huh?”

Making sure there aren’t any Skeletons inside, we pick and enter a random room, and I say that to break the ice.

“Yeah, I think it’s too dangerous to trust other people just yet”

Even the kind-hearted Futaba-san, with all her cruel experiences to date, spoke words of suspicion towards the two without stammer.

“I think so too. That’s why I lied”

I have no regrets. I was anxious whether they’d see through it though.

In all likelihood, they could be lying too. Like actually, Nishiyama-san can shoot Aer Sagitta chantless. Or like Hirano-kun has other Battle Arts too.

If it's secrets, we all have some.

"By lying, you mean about me?"

"I'm glad you stayed quiet. Kinda thought you'd suddenly go *Actually, I'm a Berserker* or something"

"N-No I wouldn't! I can at least read the mood okay!"

That's why she stayed out of most of the conversation I bet. We hadn't considered this situation, and it'd be hard to match our stories. Throwing all the explaining business to me was the right choice for Futaba-san.

We should've have thought about the possibility of sudden encounters like this and decided on a code of action, that's my only small regret. I'm reflecting on it.

"But I never thought there'd suddenly be classmates at the jump destination"

"We'll need to be careful next time. Or they could suddenly come attacking"

Futaba-san's vigilance is churning full-throttle. But this level of caution is just right.

"I think you know, but we'll be working together with them for now"

"... Are you sure?"

"You've seen their power. They've got better vocations than me at least"

"That's not true!"

My slight self-derision replied with such a strong denial, I get a bit surprised. You don't need to deny it so hard.

"Ah, s-sorry"

"No, it's fine, I appreciate the pat on the back"

Well, I guess it's true that I saved her life once. *I'm glad I was a Shaman instead of some half-baked fighter type*, is something say only for that occasion.

"Anyway, those two can at least listen to reason, and making more allies

should make it safer in the long run I guess”

“That’s, well true... but after beating the Boss, they’ll still be with us, right...?”

“Eh, is that a problem?”

On the contrary, after the Boss, if we go, *Welp, see ya*, it’s even more awkward.

“Not that... but, you don’t know, when they’ll betray. Like in my case”

“Ah, y-yeah, you’re right”

In my case, it was the matter of Higuchi one-sidedly attacking me, so I have my guard up against that, but getting abandoned when the going gets tough, that kind of pattern isn’t something fully engraved in me. I get it technically, but for Futaba-san who’s actually gone through that kind of betrayal, it’s natural she won’t be able to trust someone just because they’re a bit friendly.

“If possible, I’d like to avoid getting into big trouble though. Anyone will try and save their own skin. They could last-minute betray an ally... But on the contrary, if we have smooth progress, there’s no reason for that to happen. What we need is, rather than a relation of trust, we need enough power to secure safety.”

“So you mean, from now on, we should try to ally with as many classmates as we can right?”

“Yeah, but not Higuchi though. I’ll Curse those guys to hell!”

Fufun, I laugh half joking, half serious.

“Yep, you can do it Momokawa-kun”

But if you give me a gentle, full smile agreement to that, I get a feeling much complicated. More so, since Futaba-san has a more, pacifist-like image to her.

“Anyway, we gotta take down that Boss before any of that”

“*Emm*, so we’ll, practice?”

“Yes. I needed to talk properly with Futaba-san, but the part about wanting to practice is also true”

The Skeleton is truly a convenient practice partner. Before entering this area,

what Monster, at what timing, how many, we didn't know a thing. It was all a per-encounter basis, so the best we could do, was avoiding fights we could avoid.

But here, we can fight Skeletons in peace. Open space, known enemy, low numbers. It could be that, after leaving here, we'll never get to such a beginner friendly area.

"I want to see if I can get a little more out of Blackhair and Mud Doll. Futaba-san too, isn't it better if you get more confidence in your Repel and Foresight?"

"Yeah, that's true Momokawa-kun. I'll, try them out!"

Thus, our leveling began. [4]

(TN: I was thiiis close to writing grinding instead of leveling...)

[1] It is here that we get the pronunciation of Blessed Body ~! It's Keitai. Incidentally, this also means phone if written differently.

[2] I guess he means the area outside the Fairy Square.

[3] Here's a Video. It actually says Dragon Fireworks but in English it's fountain I guess...

[4] I was thiiis close to writing grinding instead of leveling...

Chapter 33: Practice part.2

“— Blackhair Bind”

Raven hair flies out from the shadows to coil around the ankle of a wandering Skeleton. But this time, it wasn't flayed like weeds, but taut as a rope, twining around the Monster.

“Yes, braiding is a go!”

Yes, what came upon invoking, was the punishing Blackhair in its newly braided glory.

In the fight with the Great Frog, my Blackhair Bind couldn't do a thing. With only those few strands of hair coiling about, a Monster can all too easily shake it off.

At present, my Blackhair Bind is the only thing useful in battle, that too, only at restraining the enemy; so I'll focus on excelling at that. But it's not like a game where I can put in accumulated Skill Points to the Skill I want to improve.

That being, how does this strengthening work anyway? I've thought of three ways.

Number one: by simply being granted powerful abilities. The so called levelup. But, this method depends on God's whim, so how much I need to fight to get a new Skill, or more so, what Skill will be granted, I can't choose anything. God knows when I'll get to power up, literally.

Number two: by repeatedly using a Skill, I'll attain mastery. If you could call it a proficiency leveling system, then my gamer-senses will start tingling, and even if it's not the case, there's always the saying that practice makes perfect.

This not being mere coincidence is proved by the existence of Hirano-kun and Nishiyama-san who've constantly kept using their techniques and Magic. Though there's no dramatic rise in strength, they still got *used to* using their Skills themselves, something that is indispensable in the rush of battle. There's more than enough merit in training, or more like, from here onwards, it'll likely become absolute necessity.

And last but not least, the method 3 is: ingenuity. This is where, even without the ability's strength or effect changing, using it in a different way or two can lead to many other applications. Futaba-san using her Berserker strength to throw stones, can also be said to be one form of ingenuity.

With that, me braiding the strands of my Blackhair Bind is that so called ingenuity, that I have just successfully implemented. The result is plain as day. Rather than separated strands of hair, all of them working together visibly increases their toughness.

"Hmm, so it really worked huh"

"You did it, that's great Momokawa-kun!"

Futaba-san's praising words, honestly feels great.

Incidentally, the Skeleton restrained with the braided bind, was promptly pulverized with a blow from Futaba-san's battle-axe.

"It kinda sounds obvious, but the image is pretty important"

When I gave it a try without thinking too hard about it, it was a splendid failure. But then, after thinking about how braiding works, and actually trying it a bit of my long-ish hair to solidify the image, the result is voila.

"Alright, next is the length and number, let's get crackin'!"

It's been several dozen minutes that I've been walking around with Futaba-san in the passages. Peeking through rooms, we encounter foes. Feels pretty much like grinding in an RPG.

"Haa... looks like this is it for now"

Results: hair length extends to 2 meters. Number of braids: a maximum of 2. When making 2, the length of each is cut to half, that is, to 1 meter, is what I've determined.

And after binding and playing around with many Skeletons, as usual, Futaba-san destroys them. Thinking carefully, we may look like doing we're doing something cruel, but I can explain it away such that this is all for science. I mean, the other party's coming at us with the intend to kill so why not.

"It's amazing Momokawa-kun. The Curses are getting to be really something!"

“N-no~, you flatter me,ahaha...”

With the joyous smile, and straight-forward complements from Futaba-san, man it’s embarrassing. I’m not the type that gets praised in general, so with the complements coming in on rapid-fire, it’s really more embarrassing than anything.

If she keeps this up, I might just become a good-for-nothing very quickly. Kind, great at cooking, plus complements galore, Futaba-san, I wonder if she’s trying to become a machine that produces hopeless men.

“A-Anyway, I’ll test out Mud Doll next”

“Yeah, go for it Momokawa-kun”

Being watched over under a gaze like that of an affectionate mother, I get myself together, and concentrate on Curse practice.

This time, I’m testing if you can make the Doll with something other than mud. More like, *can’t I use Monster materials to make a really powerful Doll*, is the encompassing thought and goal.

The uselessness of the Mud Doll, is obvious looking at the battle with the Great Frog. I need to at least increase the resilience a bit more, or else it won’t even serve as a distraction. Currently, it only amounts to the level of collecting chump change doing street performances or something.

However, if it is the case that, depending on the material, I can create powerful Dolls... the dream gets bigger all at once. *Now, arise, my strongest Servant!*^[1]

(TN: Servant is in English desu... like in Fate)

“... Ah, there’s no mud”

Is what I realized after gathering the remnants of Skeletons and arranging them into what would become the Doll’s skeleton. My increasingly rising tension, upon such a reality, underwent a sharp decline.

The Curse’s name even has Mud in it, so not including it as a production element, I don’t foresee the process coming to fruition.

“So you really need the mud?”

“Yeah, with a skeletal structure from Skeletons, and using mud to make the meat, is the image I had in mind. We have water, but if only I had just a bit more sand—”

“Uh huh... then, Ei!”

Contrary to the gentle cry, the sounds of destruction were brutal. *What the*, I thought but then saw, bashing her battle-axe into the wall in full swing, there was Futaba-san.

“Ah, look, I did it Momokaka-kun! There’s sand now see!”

What Futaba-san struck apart, was the stone wall with the thickness of a cinderblock. The blade of the axe had eaten through the wall, reaching the other side, from where the underground sand spewed out.

Speaking of the dungeon’s construction, we must be underground. So breaking a wall, you’ll be presented with the soil bed beyond, would be the correct in theory... But for actually testing that out, you’d need to get past those unreasonably tough walls.

“T-thanks”

Though I continue to be astounded at how naturally she wields her Berserker strength, since I got what I wanted, I can do nothing but thank Futaba-san.

Anywho, now I can continue the experiment creating a Mud Doll with Skeleton parts.

The image is important. As for the prep work for this Curse, I remember it fine from having done it before. So, all that’s left is to finish the form, imaging vividly, and try it out.

“Rise from chaos, bind in foul blood, stand on stained earth—”

Atop the floor, I have the bone fragments of Skeleton arranged in a human shape. On top of that, I take the sand provided by Futaba-san and mix it with the Fairy Square water in the plastic bottle, creating mud and adding it to the structure. The make is simple to the extreme. So there’s no complicated imaging necessary either.

If this fails, then I don’t think it’ll work no matter how many ways I try.

So, pretty please Ruinhilde-sama. Let me have, just a bit more hope— offering up such a prayer, I let drops of fresh blood fall onto the human shape of mud.

“—Vile Mud Doll!”

And the results are made clear immediately.

“Yes, it’s alive!?”

Bestowed with cursed life, the Mud Doll stood tall adhering my command.

Its appearance, practically same as the first one. The bones were framed inside so the outside is tinted mud brown... but there was one fundamental difference.

“Wa, this one, its like it’s wearing a mask”

Yes, just as Futaba-san commented, the Mud Doll this time is wearing a mask. It was a fragment of bone I had put inside the head area. Shaped like a pie graph with 60% filled, the fragment was perfectly tacked on the Mud Doll’s face.

“H-hell yes, this thing’s, it’s really adapting to the material!”

The once useless Vile Mud Doll, it’s now time to peer into your endless possibilities.

“OK, next let’s make a bigger one!”

With rising tension like a salmon swimming up a raging waterfall assailing me, I make towards the next experiment without a moment wasted. [2]

(TN: It actually says eel, not salmon...)

Speaking of, the material for the next version is all ready.

This room contains two Skeletons that we defeated. One had its body smashed to bits and was unreminiscent of its former form, but the other had only its cranium completely blown off, with its body left as is.

These are ones I had left for Futaba-san to defeat beforehand. Though her enemy were dull headed Skeletons, seeing such splendid results, I can’t help but think she’s gotten quite used to battle. At the very least, I can’t see her losing even if she’s surrounded by Mobs like Goma or Red Dogs.

“Hey, Momokawa-kun. Isn’t it like, if you make it bigger, you’ll need that much more blood for it?”

As I was diligently molding away mud on the life-sized Skeleton in high spirits, Futaba-san suddenly raised a doubt.

“Yeah, I mean, I guess so. But I really wanna see how far I can take this Mud Doll. If it gets dangerous, I’ll stop, don’t worry”

I mean, it’s not like I’ll willingly let out my blood till I die or anything. With a bit of my Ointment, the tiny cut is easy mode. There’s no danger to be found.

“A-Alright, if you say so... be careful okay?”

I wonder how long passed after I inattentively replied, *Yeah*. Anyway, covering the life-sized skeleton with mud would be inefficient without anything like a shovel, so it took a good while longer.

At one point, we went back to get a refill of water. Hirano-kun and Nishiyama-san looked at us with strange eyes as we were hurriedly collecting water from the fountain all covered in mud, but I can’t be concerned about that right now.

“And, it’s done!”

After much elbow-grease, the Mud Doll’s body is finally conceived. Structure-wise, it’s literally the same as the one just before. Only the size is of human height.

Though primarily, the goal is to get a large Mud Doll, this experiment also counts as a test to see if multiple can be controlled together. So the one made before is left as is.

If, everything goes well, the life-sized Mud Doll moves around, then, along with a decently sized Doll in my possession, it’ll be possible to birth a good number of them at the same time. Like, *let us forge, the Strongest Servant Army*.

“Well, here goes nothing”

“Y-Yeah”

Feeling Futaba-san’s gaze, as she swallows her spit in suspense, watching over me, I challenge the 2nd Curse trial.

“Rise from chaos—”

I let down, the first drop of blood.

The drop of red falls straight down, it hits the human shape at the forehead area— and, wew, comes a dizziness.

“Bind in foul blood—”

What was that, must be nothing. I thought, during which 2 drops, 3 drops, are let to fall.

And, when those come into contact with the Mud Doll,

“Stand on stained eart—”

The world swivels.

My vision violently rocks, the Mud Doll I was looking at goes far away, before I know it, I find myself looking at pure white light. *Ah, this, is the room’s light panel? Which means, I fell down I guess.*

“— Momokawa-kun!”

It looks as if it’s supposed to be loud, but her voice felt terribly far.

I’m fine, I turn to Futaba-san to try and give her some reassurance, when my vision obscures. After that, any more thoughts were—

[1] Servant is in Engrish desu... like in Fate

[2] It actually says eel, not salmon...

Chapter 34: Everyday Conversations between Highschool Boys

“Momokawa dude, that’s, just mana exhaustion right?”

Says Hirano-kun with an exasperatedly wry face.

“So that, kind of thing really happens...”

In the middle of producing the life-sized Mud Doll, I suddenly lost conscience and collapsed. I don’t remember the moments around when that happened, but according to Futaba-san, that seems to be the case.

According to Nishiyama-san, Futaba-san rushed into the Fairy Square with me in a Princess Carry with such a fierce glare that the two of them unconsciously grabbed their weapons or something or other.

Anywho, those two who were familiar with the concept of Mana Exhaustion, right away recognized my symptoms to be pertaining to that, and thus let me sleep.

Mana exhaustion, just as the words describe, it’s a state where the mana in the body is depleted, otherwise said, a state of starvation. I don’t know how much of this mana, this veritable fantasy energy, is amassed inside our bodies, but anyway, Magic and Curses seem to expend it when invoked.

At least, as a Mage, Nishiyama-san has a feel for it. Apparently, she had once gotten carried away, and used Aer Sagitta so much, she fell into symptoms indicating mana exhaustion; she has first hand experience.

Of course, she hasn’t done something like me, instantly draining all mana and suddenly fainting... But anyway, my collapsing was caused by that. My mana was apparently not nearly enough to activate a life-sized Mud Doll.

“Then how do we increase this MP thing anyway”

“That’s like, you just gotta keep fighting as a Mage, and it’ll go up eventually?”

Hirano-kun replies stating the general theory. I guess it’s like stamina after all,

you train yourself and get more.

“Yeah, Nishiyama can shoot more than she could way back when, so the levelups are real man”

I’m increasingly thankful for Nishiyama-san’s experience as a Mage.

“Anyway, just take a breather for now. The mana’ll recover eventually and ya’ll be as good as new”

“Thanks. Sorry, I’ll be taking up that offer then”

“It’s fine, we’re thinkin’ to take a nap before challenging the Boss anyway. Look, it’s right around midnight right now”

Hirano-kun told me with a glance at the G-Shock around his left wrist. Where a smartphone would run out of battery in no time, a wrist watch can be used to tell time for a long time. A clock sure is convenient. ^[1]

“Momokawa-kun, the food’s done”

Let’s get back to bed I guess, I thought lazily, when Futaba-san’s voice came from the other side of the fountain.

“Eh, Ah, that yeah”

Thanks, I said, but I had a slightly bad feeling about this.

After I woke up, Futaba-san and I celebrated my return to good health. After that, she cheerfully started making food.

I had the lighter collected from Takashima-kun, so making a fire went without issue. I’ve been hearing the crackling snaps of open fire for the past while.

Then, floated in the savoury scent of meat. Frankly, it smells great. For a while, we’ve been making like squirrels, dinner being walnuts and walnuts only, so this smell really tickles the taste buds.

No wait, please wait. Amongst our belongings, things like spare ribs, bacon strips, or sausages, we had none of those. Just what kind of highschooler would be carrying around raw meat anyway.

But then, the delicious meat that Futaba-san is roasting, just where did it...

“Here, this is the juiciest portion. Eat this, and you’ll be golden!”

With an almost dazzling smile of a caring mother, Futaba-san presents a piping hot lump of meat that gave an impression of broiled eel. With a large Fairy Walnut leaf garnished on top, a truly savage-feeling dish.

“T-Thanks...”

Gulp, I swallow my spit. This isn’t in anticipation of the cuisine. It’s from the stress.

“I only had salt for seasoning, but I’m sure it’s cooked nice and deep”

You sure about that? No really, this otherworld snake, how the hell do you cook it nice and deep!

That’s right, this meat is that snake we caught in the place with the Great Frog’s lake. I clearly remember how Futaba-san fluently drained its blood and secured this important source of protein like a practiced hunter.

That very thing has, right now, become a dish and served to me. The spicing used: otherworld rock salt.

The pair of provided chopsticks, which are probably from Futaba-san’s lunchbox, I take them in hand, and decide to accept the meal. I can’t betray Futaba-san’s good will. In front of that smile, I didn’t have the courage to reject this food without even a bite.

Peeking to the side, I see the drawn away expressions of the Hirano-Nishiyama couple. Those two, should be aware of the origins of the meat I’m about to introduce to my tongue.

Can’t expect reenrolments. Let’s get ready, and give this snake meat a taste shall we? To hell with poison, I’ll eat it plate and all.

“I, I’m digging in!”

Like a man, I roughly bite into the broiled flesh pinched between the chopsticks.

“!? delicious—”

After a modest supper, the four of us decided to retire for the day. The Fairy Square is safe, so lucky for us, there’s no reason to go out of our way to keep watch. Us being only students, staying up in alternating shifts wouldn’t fully

dispel our fatigue from the day.

“Hey, Momokawa. Snake meat, is pretty good huh”

“Yeah, if only I knew, we should’ve caught some more”

Languidly lying on the soft grass, I exchange words with Hirano-kun.

Being well into adolescence, we can’t just snuggle up four together, so the sleeping area is divided between the sexes centering around the fountain. You can’t see the other side without circling over. Furthermore, at a distance where the other side wouldn’t hear conversations unless you shout.

“You gotta to tell us when ya find other things we can eat. Urr, Intuition Pharmacy right?”

“Sure thing. But, it wouldn’t have tasted as good if you guys didn’t have the Goma rock salts”

This is completely a miss on my end, but actually, among the Gomas’ possessions there certainly existed clumps of rock salt. For the Goma warriors hunting in the dungeon, it could be called a necessity as, thought dirtied, most of them carried rock salts on their person.

That this would become a source of minerals lacking in Fairy Walnuts, was a piece of information made available in the now deceased Itou-kun’s text message info quite early on. *Those survival essentials type info, give it to all of us dammit*, I quietly curse the kingdom’s incompetence.

“By the way, I kinda wanna ask, that alright?”

“Eh, what’s up, all of a sudden”

Suddenly, Hirano-kun drew in his face close and asked. This behaviour, looks like the talk is on the hush.

“Did ya, seal the deal with Futaba-san already?”

“... Eh”

This question, I wasn’t pure enough, nor was I failing so hard in health education class, so as I wouldn’t understand.

“W-wha-what’re you saying man... That kind of, of course not”

“Oh, that reaction’s prettty fishy, you guys actually done it once didn’cha?”

“We didn’t dammit!”

hmm~, he displayed a slightly lecherous smile, and ended his inquisition for now.

“Like, what’s with that all of a sudden”

“Man, just curious y’know?”

I suppose it’s like that. But that doesn’t mean, you gotta lay it on so straight. Well, I mean, since it’s just us guys here, I guess I’ll ask.

“What about Hirano-kun then. Erm, that, with Nishiyama-san”

“Heheh, well, y’know, we like... yup”

“No way!?”

“Too loud dumbass”

So my suspicions, were spot-on.

“Eh, so, you guys’re dating now?”

“Yeaah, guess it’s like that”

A kind of boastful, embarrassed grin. But there, there’s also the hint of flaunting of someone who has graduated from his virginity and become a full-fledged man.

“No but seriously, when Itou died, me and her, we took it pretty damn hard”

“Yeah, that’s like, I kinda get how it’d go into that flow from there”

“N-No like, it wasn’t just on the spur a’ight. I’m, pretty serious about her”

Well well, I’ll leave it at that. Quite the love birds these two.

“Aren’t we, intruding?”

“Not at all man. Just us two, we couldn’t beat that Boss after all.”

“I’m glad we didn’t suddenly pop up in the middle of fun”

L’il bastard, Hirano-kun poked at me. That hurts man. At least wipe off the pervy look.

“What about you then. Never feel like doin’ it?”

“Eh, I, I well... don’t...”

But then, I end up replying in a way that screams I’m *only* thinking of that. *Knew it*, Hirano-kun snickered “Heheh”.

“Well, Futaba-san’s got those huge jugs. I feel you bro”

“Yeah, that’s... yeah, it’s that”

“’ll be crazy if y’can get with her, Momokawa. Can’t really put it between Nishiyama’s, I’m so jealous man”

Delusions churning full-throttle, but for men, this is only natural. Therefore, I cannot criticize Hirano-kun as vulgar. Sorry dude, but I’ve been fantasizing at levels of fetishism far more profound than yours.

“Also see, Futaba-san, she’s gotten kinda thinner right?”

“Eh, really?”

Now that he mentions it, I can’t say it doesn’t seem like that. *Hmm*, I wonder. I’m somehow always focused towards Futaba-san’s giant breasts and ass, those tremendous entities draw in my eyes like they’ve got gravitational pull, so I never noticed if she got, thinner.

“But yeah, she’s been fighting a lot as of late... Since I met her pretty close to the beginning, it’s like I couldn’t notice *because* I was always together”

“That’s right, Futaba-san’s defs gotten thinner man”

Popping those Power Seeds burns intense calories, so it’s like a diet pill. There’s naturally food restrictions when it comes to dungeon life, and exercise is unavoidable.

“*Hmm*, a little longer, and she could maybe slim down enough that even I can tell”

“Dude, Futaba-san gets slim, she’d be crazy hot right?”

“W-Who knows...”

I say these words, but who am I kidding, of course she’d be crazy hot.

I mean Futaba-san, she's got a pretty cute face even now. And if there's a bit less fat on her cheeks and neck, with her big round eyes, she'll totally get that healing-type hottiebishoujo face.

And most important to consider after the volume decrease, is that awe-inspiringly great chest and butt. With her drum-like waist thinning just a bit, her ginormous jugs would garner her a gravure idol level erotic body, that's just plain fact.

"Don't fret, if ya ever feel like it, I got your back. Like, you guys get together, and both you and me'll get to have some quality fun time right?"

Aha, so that's the game. With both couples doing what couples do, we'll both be cool with it. Certainly, only one side going *woohoo* in the nighttime, makes it really awkward; at worst, there might be resentment born in there too. In other words, it's a double dating plan.

Of course, me doing lewd activities with Futaba-san, I fantasize about it, but practically never think of putting it to practice. Not just Futaba-san, for me, something like a girl is a far away existence. I mean, I'm an otaku, a virgin too. I don't get how IRL girls think at all.

"Well, even if me and Futaba-san don't get together, I'll make it so we disappear sometimes so you guys can be alone together, so don't worry about that"

"Heheh, that's wicked, Momokawa"

I mean, it's not like I have any special feelings of attraction towards Nishiyama-san, so I won't be getting jealous of Hirano-kun in the first place. In fact, this level of consideration is great if we want our cooperation pact to become something more solid.

If possible, I'd like to have time alone with Futaba-san as well. No, not in a lewd way, but as an ally I can trust.

"A'ight, then after we beat the Boss, I'll take ya up on that offer"

"After we beat the Boss, and get to the next Fairy Square, sure thing"

Come that time, I hope you two can slowly enjoy your time.

Chapter 35: Orthrus

“— It’s 9 AM. We’d be in 1st period of class right about now”

Hirano-kun determined the time on his G-Shock, and spoke in a somewhat heavy tone.

“You guys ready?”

To those words, we all nod. We’re armed to the utmost. The plan’s also good. All that’s left, is to venture forth.

“Damn right, let’s get that Boss!”

Oooh, we shout out as we rush off from the Fairy Square.

Perhaps the Skeletons were reading the mood that we are headed for a boss battle, there wasn’t a single one coming out into the passage. Naturally, the passage not being particularly long, we passed through in no time, and arrived in front of a room, the so-called Boss Room, containing the Transfer Circle.

“Final check, Momokawa, on you”

“We enter the room and first, Futaba-san and Nishiyama-san preemptively do stone throwing and Sagitta respectively. I’ll use my Fever in there too, but don’t expect much. We do this until it gets close enough”

This preemptive strike will be a success if the enemy gets a decent amount of damage, or also if it gets cautious and keeps a distance. Scariest thing would be if it suddenly jumped us, and us getting an early casualty without even time to think. We have to avoid a 2nd Itou-kun no matter what.

“Once the Boss gets into range, Hirano-kun and Futaba-san will work on holding it off. I’ll look for a chance to bind the Boss Dog with my Blackhair. Nishiyama-san stays on cover fire.”

There’s no risk of mana exhaustion. Nishiyama-san can shoot quite a few of her Aer Sagitta, and if I only concentrate on Blackhair Bind, I can maintain it for a decent amount of time.

“Once it gets close, we just have to keep fighting it... but if one of you two get pushed back, it’ll be a pinch but also a chance. There’s only one enemy. Even if Futaba-san or Hirano-kun, one of them is beaten, the other one can use that opening to launch a powerful strike”

Losing Itou-kun, with just the two of them, the Hirano-Nishiyama couple’s fatal weakness, is that they can’t take advantage of the Boss’ predating behaviour. If Hirano-kun is thrown down first, Nishiyama-san who doesn’t possess any powerful Battle Art can’t deal a significant blow. Worst case, she could cast Aer Blast, but then, with the wide area explosion that Magic generates, Hirano-kun who’s pancaked to the floor won’t get out fine.

“If, it breaks past the vanguard, and gets to either me or Nishiyama-san, Futaba-san in my case, and Hirano-kun in Nishiyama-san’s, one of you will come deal the blow”

Why we’re separating cases like this, it’s because we don’t want the two of them to get confused as to who will do what. In doubles tennis, when the ball comes right between both players in a team, it’ll be within both their hitting ranges, but both will let it through, is a common phenomenon.

We can’t afford that kind of miss in this fight. Especially since it’s a newly made party. We can’t match our breaths and do anything like perfectly synchronized movements.

Furthermore, the one they should save, if that person is clearly decided beforehand, they’ll be able to move better when the time comes. Because it’s when you’re amateurs in battle, that in critical moments you go “Oh no, oh no”, while your head goes blank.

Moreover, even if we decide all this, your role can change any time depending on the situation and best choices present. But, but still, we should have these things decided just in case, is our opinion.

“Once the Boss gets even a little weakened, everyone will gang up on it. I’m sorry for the one getting injured, but beating it takes higher priority. If it isn’t anything major, my meds can take care of it”

That concludes the plan. Next, we only have to believe in our power and fight. There’s nothing else to rely on anyway.

Finally, I take a look at all three of their faces one more time. Just a few days past, we saw each other in class but never even said a decent hi, we were related solely as classmates. And now, we're entrusting our lives to one another, going forth to challenge a fearsome Monster.

It feels kind of unreal. Still, holding our respective weapons, donned in slightly dirty uniforms, our figures ooze nothing but reality.

Just for survival, a fight risking life and limb, now starts.

"Everyone, here we go"

Hell yeah! Hirano-kun shouts with might, along which Futaba-san and Nishiyama-san spiritedly follow, their voices echo into the dim passage.

Thus, we pass through cave-like, doorless entrance where the man-eating beast sleeps.

Futaba-san and Hirano-kun as vanguard. Me behind the former and Nishiyama-san behind the latter, we form two lines. Us in the rearguard can't get too separated from the other two. There's a higher risk of us getting targeted, but if we're too distanced, our help-line will be cut off.

This is probably, the best formation we have.

"... Where is it?"

"I think, up there"

The room was as large as a gymnasium. Like the rooms where Skeletons come out, there are multiple pillars on both sides. It's reminiscent of a temple, but other than the pillars, there's no other form of decor, a dreary room. The multiple light panels on the ceiling only let out dim light so there's difficulty seeing. The corners of the room are too dark to make out.

But, rather than concerning myself with the corners, I focus on what Hirano-kun meant by up there. Truly like a gym in the dungeon, raised in the back of the room is a single stage. With stairs on both sides, the stage was just around two stories high. It's likely, that the Transfer Circle is engraved up there. ^[1]

(TN: Visual Aid for gym. The stage in this case seems much higher though...)

Suspecting as such, I look over to the stage... when I heard it.

Grrr, the beast's growl.

"It's there, it's def's there"

"... Momokawa-kun"

"Wait, looks like it's coming here"

In the bad sense of tension, I certainly saw the apparent shadow of the Boss landing on the ceiling from the reflected light. Seems like it has also noticed our presence.

Just as expected, the boss appeared from on top of the stage, seeking out it's new prey, it peeked out its face.

I saw, like the Red Dog, but as if a completely different species from that frail one, it was a big, fearless, ferocious, and blood-thirsty face. Rather than a dog, it was a form more similar to that of a wolf. That, fearsome, crimson wolf's visage— there were two.

"... Eh, there's two"

Two heads glared at us.

"No Momokawa-kun, that's—"

No way. There's two bosses, that's not the case at all. Just as Futaba-san denied the assertion, look there, see, there's only one Boss. Because, that large brawny body like that of a lion, there was but one.

"W-wh-what the fuck, it...'s got, two heads!"

"No, how can, it's not the same one as before!?"

A two-headed red-furred wolf. That was, the form of the Boss appearing before us.

"Retreat!"

I yelled without a second thought.

Scared? Of course. Right now, in front of the two-headed Red Dog, the Orthrus, all of us are severely panicked. If we fight here, there's no doubt it'll go bad.

And above all, there's no way it's looks are for show. I can imagine it being at least stronger than the aforementioned big sized Red Dog.

The reason it's a different Boss from the one Hirano-kun's team once fought, it could have been summoned by the dungeon system's whim, or perhaps the old one evolved after eating Itou-kun. I know practically nothing on the ecology of dungeon Monsters, and right now, it doesn't matter in the least.

What's important is, first and foremost, getting out of here and starting ove—

“Look out, Momokawa-kun!”

I was the first to turn heel, and dash towards the entrance, but along with Futaba-san's yell, my body strongly jerks. Looks like, my collar was grabbed from behind, and pulled with great strength.

“Uwah!”

Or so I thought I shouted, but I my voice wouldn't reach my ears.

Dazzling burst of flame, and an ear-shattering explosion. That is, drawing a tail of crimson, a ball of light coming straight at me, is what I saw before I got pulled back.

“Uooh! Goddammit, the hell was that just then, fire, it blew fire!?”

“Magic, that's gotta be Magic! It's shooting Fire Magic!”

By the time I heard Hirano-kun and Nishiyama-san shouting out, I had separated from Futaba-san's hand, and stood back up on my feet.

“Thanks, Futaba-san”

“Don't worry, more importantly, that wolf... what should we do”

I once again look up to where the Boss was. From the Red Dog, the Orthrus' sharp fangs peeking out of its mouths, seeming to be vestiges of the ball of fire that was shot, sparks were blowing out. I saw it from both mouths, so both heads must have shot Fire Balls.

Luckily, thanks to Futaba-san, I was spared with only feeling the heated winds. But, thinking back how it was pretty much a hairs-breadth from the explosion, it probably doesn't pack much explosive force. However, the problem is the

longevity. From moment of impact, it was roaring like oil on fire.

Right there, the place I was heading to, the entrance.

“Oi, the hell Momokawa! Ya tried to run an’ the exit’s fuckin’ gone now!”

“Wh-, you think that’s my fault!”

I reflexively replied and, *shit*, I thought. Now’s not the time for stupid internal conflict. But, now that Hirano-kun’s felt that my attempt to escape was an act of selfish cowardice, I can’t just negate that impression with words.

That boss had cunningly surmised that that hole in the wall was our one and only escape route, and acted to destroy it before anything else. Even if I didn’t try to run, it’s likely to have caused the explosion with the same timing.

“But, you’re the one who saw the boss and ran right away”

Yeah, that’s right, me trying to run before anything is the undeniable truth. If we had successfully retreated, you could calm down and realize that it was the right decision, but with the situation like this, of course this is what you say.

“Wait, I get it, it’s my fault. But we can’t keep arguing like this. The exit’s gone, so we can just follow the plan and—”

“Don’t fuck around, it’s your damn fault! Fix it Momokawa!”

“What were you thinking, we can’t even escape anymore!”

Shit, shit! Dammit all, we’re done for, the two of them are near delirious, they aren’t looking at the situation. More like, I don’t know if I’m alright either. My heart’s pounding and my head feels like it’ll blank out any moment now.

It’s bad, it’s crazy bad. I gotta do something. I was growing impatient.

“W-wait you guys, calm down already!”

If those two don’t calm down, we can’t fight. We can’t fight, and the Boss is already here.

“It’s coming, Momokawa-kun!”

With Futaba-san’s sharp warning, my head jolts up. Beside me, Hirano-kun and Nishiyama-san were also visibly trembling. They’re scared too. They’re also confused.

“Ah, aaa... Oi oi, wait up!”

“Kyaaa!”

As if meaning to say, *the game’s already started stupid humans*, the Orthrus lightly jumped down from the stage full of composure. It landed nimbly from the two-story height like a cat. Though it’s a dog.

Its needlessly elegant movement, upon its legs contacting the ground, vanished. Like a gale, it dashes in a straight line. True to its appearance, the Orthrus commands terrific acceleration from its four legs. Like the form of a lion in its hunt I’ve seen on TV, but a many hundreds of times more intense. I could faint from just this. I can’t make fun of those two screaming out.

But here, it’s do, or die. Get a hold of yourself, Momokawa Kotarou. It’s way to soon, to throw in the towel.

“Futaba-san, start throwing! Entwine its escape—”

I don’t know if Nishiyama-san will follow the plan with her Sagittas. I can only rely on Futaba-san, who didn’t go blaming me. Once the battle starts, those two are gonna have to fight sooner or later.

Anyway, the Boss started coming at us, so there’s no time for Red Fever. I chose to employ, the physical suppressor, my Blackhair Bind.

Futaba-san’s stones only scratch its undulating red fur, and as for my Blackhair, by the time it thrust out around its feet, it had jumped to dodge. And from the momentum, it leapt in the direction of Hirano-kun.

“U-uwaaaaaah!? StoOOOOOOOooooop!”

With a throaty scream, Hirano-kun fell over backwards. Unable to properly break his fall on the hard stone, his back struck painfully on the floor. He raised groans, and it doesn’t seem like he can stand any time soon.

For the Boss, it should be the same like Itou-kun with the pounce and devour pattern, but it didn’t intend to get on top of Hirano-kun just yet. With both heads, it turned to the side.

“YaAAAAAAAAAAAAaa!”

With a loud swing of her axe, Futaba-san bravely cut towards the Boss.

Yet, the Boss had already detected her attack, and with swift steps, jumped from the spot, evading Futaba-san's strike like it was no big deal. The floor hit by the powerful axe blade, scattered sparks.

"Don't give in, Hirano-kun! Stand up quick— Blackhair Bind"

Calling out to the fallen Swordsman, I enter to aid Futaba-san. I say that, but my powerless muscles can't possibly use my spear and get anywhere close, so I can only cast Blackhair Bind.

Futaba-san swings away a 2nd, a 3rd time, but as if reading the trajectory, the Boss elegantly twists its body and dodges. To add, at its blindspot-like feet area where bundles of Blackhair were emerging, it dodged it all with light steps. Not a thread of hair could entwine.

"If that won't work, then—"

Near reflexively, I thrust out my right hand. As if I'm releasing control of my limbs, I focus my conscience solely on the Curse. More, more precise, more vivid, image it fully.

The long stands of hair, divide into three. Then, one after another, one at a time, very carefully, braid it. See, you can do it, I did it, beautiful braided hair.

"— How's this!"

The umptieth Blackhair Bind, this time arranged in a braid, escaped the ground like a viper. That too the Boss foresaw, dodging with a side step.

However, this Braided Bind has long reach.

I powerfully swing my right hand. As if linked to the movement, the Braid sweeps at its feet. The length of the hair is around 3 meters. The Boss had side stepped to a distance, and it barely reached.

"Got 'im! Futaba-san!"

The Boss' left hind leg. Around the ankle, the Braid whistled as it whipped through the air, and coiled on. Twice, a third time, the hair winds around, and steals its nimble feet.

"HaAAAAAAAAAAAAa!"

It's over. The Boss can't go any further.

Faced with the blade approaching with tremendous strength, the Boss turned in two directions.

The right head, glaring at the nearing Futaba-san. The left head, greatly turning back, stretching its neck. The target of its gaze, those annoying Blackhairs.

Clink, a sound comes from its fang. Right after, the left head blows fire.

I thought, but it had been too late. Not being metal or anything, the Blackhair that was only fibres, burned, immediately losing all binding ability.

Its left foot released by the roaring flames, the Boss regained its agility, and with a paper-thin margin, dodged Futaba-san's swing.

This time wasn't a composed step, but a steep dodge meant for evading. Still, the axe once again beat the floor.

And with its barely scraped by dodge, the Boss attained the chance to counter. Within arms reach, there stood an enemy who had swung her axe full power, and is currently chock full of openings.

"Gu, UUu!"

With that groan, Futaba-san's large body was flung through the air like nothing. Her abdomen was struck with a piercing dog punch. In no time, Futaba-san's body took many meters of distance rolling on the floor, finally coming to a stop when it hit a pillar in a corner of the room.

"Futaba-san!"

I shouted out, not only for concern of her well-being. The powerful vanguard that was Futaba-san having been blown away, distance to the powerless rearguard that is me, opened up right away. Position-wise, the Boss can vie to finish of Hirano-kun who's still down, or change its target, preying for me or Nishiyama-san.

What now. Having nothing better than Blackhair Bind in terms of resistance, I can only watch what it does. And with no obstructions coming from anywhere, the Boss takes the optimum action.

Gauu it howled, as both heads clinked their fangs. The pair of mouths, shoot out a brilliant band of flame. A Fire Beam.

The blazing fire, strangely made a loose curve in the air, as Futaba-san was trying to get up, towards her, no, the fire impacted around her as if trying to encage her.

“Ah, fuck... it split us...”

I swallow my breath at its ability and tactical operation. Deeming Futaba-san as the biggest risk factor, it cast flames unto her surroundings, sealing her. A jail of fire with radius 5 meters was formed at a corner of the room.

“U, Uu... Momokawa-kun!”

From beyond the vigorously flickering flame, came Futaba-san’s voice. Seems like she hasn’t become barb-a-cue’d pig, so that’s a relief.

The Boss could’ve aimed its Fire Beam at Futaba-san herself, finishing her off for good, but it didn’t. Maybe it’s making light of us. It could also just prefer its meat raw.

It’s great that Futaba-san is alright, but my situation hasn’t changed in the slightest.

“Wait Futaba-san! Don’t try forcing out of there. Wait till the fire dies down a bit more. We’ll manage here somehow!”

I shout as I take a peek at the entrance that was blocked at the start. Kind of, looks like the fire there died down a bit. The wall of fire won’t surge eternally, it’s the greatest proof.

That’s why, there’s no reason Futaba-san needs to become a human torch trying to forcefully pass through the flame wall. Her injured, and we lose a lot of the battle power needed to beat the Boss. So, we have to endure here. No matter what, I’ll buy time until Futaba-san comes back.

As if sneering at my determination, the beast amusedly growls full of composure, eagerly aiming its two heads at me and leers. *Maybe I’ll eat this guy*, it could me thinking.

I clumsily point my spear, and Nishiyama-san next to me is still

dumbfoundedly grabbing onto her wand. Only the beast's growl echoes, a strange, quiet time passes.

"U, guu... damn..."

Result: the Boss chose Hirano-kun who'd gotten back up to his knees.

The two heads viciously bore its fangs, this time aiming to make sure he stays down.

"U, UWaAAAAAAa!"

"KyaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAa!"

As Hirano-kun and Nishiyama-san's screams reverberate, I try making use of Blackhair Bind in hopes of restraining it.

"Bind!"

Even more focus than before. This time I called forth two braids. *I'm getting better*, but I don't have time to get happy about that, I aim the braid snakes rising from the ground towards the Boss' heads as if to lash it.

"GaAAAh! Hot! Too hot, dammiit!"

Still, my upgraded Blackhair Bind is also, powerless in the face of flames. Both were quickly annihilated with bursts of Fire Beam. The Boss' assault on Hirano-kun, isn't abated in the slightest.

"U, uh... UoOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

A bit of hesitation, but resolve made. We can't go losing Hirano-kun at this stage. I give up on useless Curses, and determine to attack directly with my spear.

With an embarrassingly shrill war cry, I dash my shaking legs towards the Boss. Ah, close, too close. It's crazy big from up close.

"DeyaAAAAAAAh!"

With a boost from the Power Seed I swallowed on before entering the Boss Room, I unleash my strike. As the Boss is pushing down Hirano-kun, I aim to stab at its flank. I can't think it can dodge at this close a distance.

But as the cruel world would have it, the spear with my all, cut only air.

Nothing fancy, the Boss known for its agile body, simply jumped out of the way.

“Gi,iaAAAAAAAh!”

The beast landed as if unaffected by gravity, which is when Hirano-kun cried out seeming on the verge of death. Looking, I find his neck gushing out blood.

Just before the Boss dodged, it apparently had its fangs lodged in quite deep.

“Hirano-kun!”

This is bad, if I don’t stop the bleeding now, he’ll definitely die. Luckily, my bag contains a decent amount of Ointment A. If I rub some on, the blood should stop somewhat.

But then, I won’t have time for that. This is a real-life fight, not a turn-based RPG you can take your sweet time considering all the choices.

“Uu, uWaaa!?”

The Boss begins its counterattack. Perhaps deciding Hirano-kun is already one foot on the other side, it now aimed at me who had come attacking.

Naturally, being neither Swordsman nor Berserker, as one with the weakest vocation known as Shaman, from this distance, with this timing, a form of resistance, cannot be hoped for.

What do I. I thought, as the Boss’ body closed in with frightening speed—

“—aAAAAh!”

With a pathetically girly scream, I fall back onto the floor. It hurts. Pain as if all the air in my lungs was pressed out.

But this pain is only the beginning. The Orthrus’ hungry head, is already right in front of me, spreading its drool.

“Uwah, WaAAAAAh!?”

Fangs closing in, speaking of what I responded with, I reflexively put up my hands. Of course, I’d long let go of the spear, and as for taking out any sub-weapons like the boxcutter or Goma dagger, there was no time to even think of it.

My arm that can't even break away a decent branch from a Fairy Walnut tree, is injected deeply by the wolf's fangs.

"lih, aaAAAAAaAaAa!!!"

Discarding all pride and shame, I scream. The pain in my arm quickly supersedes the limit of pain I can hope to bear.

Like a ravenous beast, it will devour my arm, I thought so, but au contraire, the Boss' mouth separated. **Gyau**, a slightly pained growl enters my ears at the same time.

"A, ha, haha... that's right, you eat me... and you're, done for too!"

Curse No.2 Pain Return is doing its job. The tearing on my arm from the Boss' fang, replicates back on its fore leg.

In its moment's falter, I gain the chance to counter. This time for sure, I'll draw that Goma dagger on my belt, and with no other thoughts, just slash away at the hairy red body in front of me.

It's tougher than I thought. The slightly rusted blade, dug through the fur and a slight bit of meat, and stopped; nothing close to a fatal blow.

Shiit, I can't even stick in a knife sitting down like this. But, I can maybe stab and—

"Gyau!"

A scream comes from both heads of the Boss. As if wary of my slashing, it disregarded possible damage from Pain Return, and mercilessly dug its claws into my collar.

"Gu, gaa... S-stupid, mutt..."

This mutt, maybe it doesn't actually realize the damage from Pain Return is coming back to it. My shoulder radiated pain from skin-tearing claws, and pressure from its pushed down forepaw so strong, I thought my bones would break. The Boss is supposed to be tasting the same pain, but this mutt, doesn't look like it's letting go any time soon.

But there's no fatal blow like snapping off my neck. If it wanted, it could gouge off my thin neck with one bite. That must mean, it really is cautious of my

Pain Return, and can't get in the mind to deal the finisher.

Me and the Boss continue tasting the same pain, neither one giving in. Sharp pain eats into my body, my breath almost stopping with the weight of the Boss pressuring over me. *Will I die like this, taking this guy along with me*, and when I thought that,

“N-Nishiyamaaaa! Shoot! Shoot it nooow!”

It was Hirano-kun. I direct my glance where, he's desperately stopping his bleeding with a hand, shakily standing up.

“Hirano! B-but—”

“It's fine, just shoot! Shoot dammit! Shoot your Blast, Momokawa and all!”

My spine freezes. Not good. With my label as a coward trying to run away first, she'll lose the resistance to shooting an ally. *Ah, God fucking dammit*. I didn't do anything wrong. But if this was gonna happen, I would've never done it.

Stormed with irredeemable, humiliating regret, I can only keep suppressing the Boss' approaching fangs.

العديد من ريش تبادل لاطلاق النار
“I, I'll, shoot! الرياح”

I heard the countdown of death.

Shit, shiiit! Stop, stop it you idiots! That's friendly fire assholes!

My head teeming with words of curse, but also, *Ah, can't be helped, you can sacrifice this weakling Shaman and beat the Boss, hip hip hooray for you*. Some cooled down thoughts are in there too.

The Boss being the Boss, it doesn't notice the Attack Magic aiming towards it. It's like, while attacking me and getting back the pain, it's losing its reason, and needlessly focusing on me.

Each and every one of them, myself included, were all hopeless.

“— Aer Blast!”

[1]Visual Aid for gym. The stage in this case seems much higher though...

Chapter 36: Selection

Surrounded by raging flames, Futaba Meiko felt a true sense of crisis.

She could feel the scorch singeing at her skin... but fortunately, the blaze isn't actually grilling her in here, she realizes. Most likely, this is the same as the flames sealing the entrance, it will only burn around her.

"Uu, -ast... I have to get out fast"

Though her body itself wasn't on fire, if she kept waiting around in here, she felt she would get baked from the heat bit by bit.

The wall of flame wasn't the only thing pressuring Meiko. Kotarou and the others were likely having an extremely tough fight, sounds of screams and roars were coming in. Tormented by the heatwaves, Meiko couldn't decipher the contents of those yells, but anyway, she needed to return at this moment if possible, or they could be annihilated, she imagined.

She must hurry. But, just as Kotarou said, if she forcefully broke through the wall, she could be wounded to the level of becoming an obstruction in battle.

She must escape, and at the same time, must limit the damage to the bare minimum.

It was a mission impossible-like situation, but, Meiko who had since obtained courage, kept her coolness of mind even as time was approaching zero.

If Kotarou's words are to be believed, the fire would begin to die down in some amount of time.

And for Meiko, there was nothing she could believe more, in this cruel otherworld dungeon, than his words.

"There!"

Seeing the flames encircling her weaken for an instant, Meiko resolved her will, and attempted to escape from the prison of fire. Fortunately, she felt an instance of heat, her uniform scorched slightly at the hems, but otherwise she broke through safe and sound.

From the momentum of jumping out, twice, three times, she rolled on hard stone and stood up when, she was struck with that scene of despair.

“Can’t, be... Momokawa-kun”

Following her gaze, there was Momokawa Kotarou, blood-smeared, and collapsed like a broken doll. Limbs sprawled, he showed no signs of movement.

Could he be... dead? At a glance, it couldn’t be determined. Nay, to begin with, something like his death, would never be accepted by Meiko.

“—**GaAAAA!**”

With no time to ponder, the ferocious roar of the Boss echoes.

Having the body and senses of a Berserker, Meiko turns her attention to the beast. The fearsome two-headed Orthrus was however, bloodied all over, and didn’t seem as strong as just before.

It has sustained significant damage. The fact that the Boss has weakened, could be seen from a glance.

“Ah—”

Before celebrating the chance to defeat the Boss, Meiko notices. Kotarou and the Boss, they’re both equally bloodied. Every one of their wounds looked all the same, but also, there was another person there, similarly fallen all bloodied.

“... Pain Return”

Recalling the power of that Curse, Meiko connects all the dots.

“Nishiyama-san, Momokawa-kun, did you shoot him?”

From Meiko’s gentle eyes, an unimaginably sharp glare shoots. Its destination, one highschool girl holding her wand, trembling in a pool of blood.

“A, Ouch... Why... I, I didn’t mean to...”

Nishiyama’s, expression despairing as if she had committed a mistake she could never take back, was all it took.

Bodies cut in multiple lines. Kotarou, Orthrus, Nishiyama. Aer Blast and Pain Return.

As the Orthrus was biting into Kotarou, Nishiyama shot them together. There was no other way to explain the situation.

“I see... You betrayed Momokawa-kun”

Speaking frigid words, Meiko moved. Drawing her axe without a moment’s hesitance, the Boss and Nishiyama, she observed the two.

As Meiko moved, so does the Orthrus bear its claws and charge. As if seeking back its lost blood, it hungers for new prey.

The starved wolf’s aim is, naturally, being the closest, and in addition, one it can predate on at ease. Boasting nothing close to any super-human physical strength, it would be the frail girl known as a Wind Mage.

“U, Aah— Aer Sagitta!”

Regardless that she herself was also wounded by blades of wind, that she could yet resist with her Wind Magic, was only because of her little but fruitful experience in dungeon capture. However, starved for blood, the Boss wouldn’t mind a few cuts of wind blade at this point, and it pushed down the powerless girl.

“Kyaaa! Noo! Help me! Please, Futaba-san!”

Meiko was all but calmly, observing the Boss greedily eyeing its feed. Screams from a traitor, she could hear such a thing all day and her heart wouldn’t even itch.

Calmly, serenely, her heart made crystal clear. Focusing on nothing but the fight. Concentrating, on nothing but killing the enemy. That is, a Berserker’s modus operandi. Pure and rational, slaughter.

“Fuuh—”

Her breathing ordered, quietly, raising the sharp axe, she takes a step.

“Kyaaa! AaAAAAAAa!”

The Boss wouldn’t notice her sharpened killing intent, wholeheartedly indulging on the prey it had captured. The roughly moving fangs and claws, shred away at Nishiyama’s body, uniform and all, digging into the maiden’s tender white skin.

As if to dine on her guts, the two heads chomp into her abdomen when,
“—Haa!”

Finishing glory. Meiko who saw this as the moment to end it, with frightening speed, and a heavy step drawing the enemy into range, swings down her axe.

GAa! with a sharp cry, the Boss moves to evade in a panic. But it cannot escape the strike, the blow delivered at the best moment, as deemed by the Berserker.

Raising a pained, shrill cry, the Orthrus has its trunk gouged deeply.

“Ih, giiAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAa!”

Similarly, Nishiyama’s scream resounds.

The axe swung down by Meiko, not only cut the Orthrus, but also cut into girl’s side.

Along with the freshly gushing deep red blood, long and narrow, winding lumps of meat popped out from the gash. Her intestines, had been severed and had fallen out.

It wasn’t an unfortunate slip of hand. She knew it would hit. She did it anyway. To cut the Orthrus, she severed her ally along the way. ^[1]

Pertaining that choice, her regrets, were nil.

“Hah, AaAAAAAAAAAa!”

Going past the dying Nishiyama, Meiko fiercely chased after the wounded Orthrus.

Gyan, whimpered the Boss, as it had turned hopelessly weak. It must have lost too much blood. Its greatest weapons, showing not a shadow of their original agility, its footwork had become unsteady.

The two-headed wolf was now, nothing but a large-sized enemy.

As the axe swings became a storm, the Orthrus had its legs smashed, neck slit, head split. In no time at all, Meiko’s overwhelming violence had made it into mincemeat.

“Nunh!”

Finally, she stomped on the remaining head, crushing its cranium, and completely stopped the Boss' life. Both heads had their grey matter scattered about. It wouldn't rise ever again.

"Ah, Uu... AaAAA..."

The greatest threat eliminated, Meiko wanted to instantly run to Kotarou, but though dying, the figure of a desperately moving Nishiyama caught her eye, so she switched priority.

Her guts spilling, Nishiyama thrust her hand inside her bag fallen beside her, taking out a single small bottle.

"Hmm, so you were hiding something like this. Hey, this is called a Potion, right?"

"Fu-Futaba-san... please... save me..."

Potion. Obtained from Treasure Chests, a magical Recovery Item. Its existence made clear from the information by the Note Circle; since Itou of the Thief class was in their party, there is the possibility of those two hiding it, Kotarou had made such a hypothesis before.

"As I thought, Momokawa-kun was right again"

"P-please... It, hurts..."

Coming near Nishiyama who was lying face up, Meiko gently squatted down. The girl tightly holding her Potion vial as if she wouldn't let go, had it quickly stolen away.

"Ah, A-Aa... Don't, give it back... please..."

Meiko pops open the seal, dipping the tip of her finger into the clear light blue liquid, and gave it a taste test. Next, she put a drop on the light burn on the back of her hand.

"Yup, no mistake, looks like this has healing effects"

Indeed, both drinking it and applying it to the affected area will grant healing.

Confirming its high recovery ability, Meiko made a satisfied expression, and as if forgetting that Nishiyama ever existed, she quickly scurried off.

“Wait... Please... please, beg you...”

“Momokawa-kun, I’ll save you right now”

Facing the limply collapsed Kotarou, Meiko reverses and let’s fall the contents of the vial. Along with sparkling particles of light, the blue liquid rains on Kotarou’s petite body.

And the results are dramatic.

Right before her eyes, the atrocious wounds on his limbs and neck close, returning his skin to a fair, maidenly white.

“I’m so glad, Momokawa-kun...”

Upon hearing his lovely, quiet breaths, Meiko smiles warmly as if looking at a cat in its midday nap. He was breathing, and his complexion was also fine. She checked for a pulse just to make sure, and that too was normal.

Momokawa Kotarou, was completely fine.

“Just leave all the rest to me”

Leaving Kotarou to peacefully sleep, Meiko turned towards the gruesome cleanup work, full of smiles.

Drawing the knife instead of the axe, she cut open the Orthrus in no time, and finished collecting the core inside its gut. Holding up the blood-smeared crystal, at the place the Boss had laid in wait, the Magic Circle reacted. Just as with the Great Frog’s lake, the room began filling with red light.

Confirming that the Transfer Circle was activating normally, following Kotarou’s example, Meiko collected their belongings without oversight. She gathered up everything that looked useful.

Meiko thus carries only their loot, and along with an innocently sleeping Kotarou, departs the Boss Room. Hirano, who lay still after losing a copious amounts of blood from his neck, and Nishiyama, who now lost even the ability to groan, the two classmates were left behind in the dimly lit room.

[1] Eh, just trivia, 断ち切った → severed — also has a double meaning of

severing ties (lol)

Chapter 37: Kenzaki Asuna and Takanashi Kotori

“Haa... Haa... I brought it down, Hiroki...”

Swarms of Goma corpses lay about. At the peak of that mountain of cadavers, the Boss Goma that held the Demon Sword was scattering into light particles.

Learned skills	
Counter	Can respond to close-range attacks. Possible to repel blades or even fire.
Reflector	Can respond to long-range attacks. Possible to repel arrows or even lightling.
Righteous Fist	A foundation of the Souma-Style Unarmed Combat Arts. A fist that is fast, heavy.

Acquired skills	
Break	Boosts Hit Damage. Deals the enemy a heavy blow.
Berserk	Inflicts Status Ailment Berserk on self. Lose your reason and sense of pain, to gain tremendous strength. [1]

(TN: Counter & Reflector are as is, simple. 一の正拳 — Ichi no Sei Ken — Righteous Fist. As can be implied, his house is a dojo.
)

Break, is the same that our Swordsman Hirano had. And Berserk, Meiko doesn’t have this exact one, but it should be like her on Courage and Madness chapter? Hero sure is one hell of a cheat~

Information on the new powers are engraved into my brain. Not only my mind, but my body too has power flowing throughout like I’m leveling up in an RPG.

Even when I’m this beat up, the power just keeps pumping in, it’s even

making me a bit worried.

“Nii-san, are you alright!?”

“Yeah, more or less. I’m fine, so please go heal the othe—”

“Just what do you think you’re saying! Look at all these cuts, you’re my top priority here nii-san!”

It’s nothing fatal, so I’m fine though. But there’s some slashing here and there, so it may just look really bloody. Well, it does hurt, but not anything I can’t bear.

“Honestly, you’re always so reckless, nii-san— Healing Light”

Sakura holds up her hands, and a dim, pale light envelops my body. *Whoa, what’s this, it’s warm, so nice.* It’s like being soaked in a hot spring, but maybe saying that would be rude.

“Looks like, I worried you. It was a pretty ugly fight”

I should really reflect on this. It was a reckless way of fighting with leaving everything to anger. If that Boss Goma, had even a bit of fighting technique, I’d have been cornered in no time. That bastard only relied on its superior strength and the Demon Sword’s sharpness, it merely brute forced its way through battles.

“No, you’d just seen you best friend get eaten. Can’t be helped you lost your cool for a bit— And look Souma, since you got so angry instead, I could see things straight”

“Thanks Asuna, if you weren’t there, I’d be done for. No, that goes for all of you. If any of you weren’t there, I—”

“*Nihaha*, we’re all comrades in arms, it’s natural we have your back!”

“Right, we won’t be letting Yuuto-kun carry all the burden”

When the fight started, the Boss Goma seemed to have perceived us as dangerous, and immediately made the surrounding standby Goma jump into the fray. It’s only because everyone worked together that we were able to overcome the fierce melee.

Sakura's arrows of light scattered the Goma, while Class Rep's ice walls blocked their way. They did their utmost to make sure I could be in a one-on-one against the Boss Goma. Natsukawa-san worked hard in the back, guarding Takanashi-san who isn't currently able to fight, and Asuna got rid of the smallfries trying to get to me, and occasionally, got a good hit on the Boss Goma too.

We just barely scraped by. A single mistake in our coordination, and it wouldn't be strange for one of us to be dead... But I'm glad we can enjoy this victory.

"Still, if I didn't lose my cool, we could've had more leeway"

"You can leave moping for later. Right now, just be happy we won. And, let's pray for Kousaka too."

I'm made to realize from Asuna's words. The rage from my fight with the Boss Goma is instantly gone, and replacing it, came the feeling of losing a best friend, only sadness.

"Yeah, you're, right..."

The vast area we fought at seems to be a so-called Boss Room. At the back of this area, there's a magic circle used for transport, and it's set so that you use the core from the Boss Goma to move over to the next area. Using these methods of instantaneous movement, or warping, before using the Divine Gate, makes the premise of a magic circle used for escape much more believable.

Luckily, the place we're warped to isn't in the middle of a pack of monsters, but inside a fairy square. There, we could rest, and more importantly, sort out our hearts.

"But still, never thought Holy Enchant had this kind of use"

"Me too, I didn't think it would go this well"

A sparkling, beautiful katana lay in front of a slightly bewildered Sakura. This is that very same Demon Sword once held by the Boss Goma.

It had been releasing a red aura, and being that strong of a seemingly cursed weapon, trying to touch it only assaulted with terrible chills. Recognizing that, I

couldn't make any proper use of it.

Still, I thought it'd be a waste to throw away such a good blade, so I tried to have Sakura cast Holy Enchant on it since we had nothing to lose...

"Yup, looks all good for now"

I give it a swing, and it's just a normal— no rather, this katana feels lighter compared to its size, but no other issues. This'll be useful.

"If the enchant wears off, I hope it stays normal"

"We'll just cross that bridge when it comes"

That being said, sometime later, the enchantment wore off, and our doubts were cleared.

Speaking from the conclusion, all was well. As if it had been purified, the red aura didn't come out anymore. The white glow disappearing as Holy Enchant wore off, it looked like a normal katana afterwards. No problem swinging it around. It was no longer a Demon Sword, but simply an excellent blade. It appears that the curse had been completely lifted.

"Asuna, you take it"

"What's this nonsense now, Souma, aren't you the one who beat the big bastard? You take it, it's yours"

"No well, it's not like I don't want to, but Asuna, your sword broke in that last fight, right? My sword is still working fine. And I've been using this for a while see, I got really accustomed to it, so don't really want to change it right now"

"B-But you can..."

A manly personality, would be somewhat rude, but Asuna's upstanding and strict character didn't allow her to quietly accept it. Having a good grasp of such feelings, the one who came to the rescue was, as expected, our good ol' Class Rep.

"Look how hard Yuuto-kun is begging you Asuna, just take it why don't you. We're all in the same team now, so it's important to properly distribute the equipment"

“Well, if it’s with my vocation and abilities, I’m sure I can make good use of this katana but...”

“So you can just show us that in our battles to come. I can’t think the dungeon ends here, and we will have to face much more powerful monsters soon enough. So we need to work our Dualwielder Asuna to the bone don’t we. We’re counting on you”^[2]

(TN: 双剣士 — Dualwielder, only in the sword sense.)

“*Fufuh*, your flattery is too sweet, I’ll take it then. And, I’ll meet your expectations too”

Looks like Class Rep somehow convinced Asuna.

“Then, Souma, I’ll be gratefully accepting this katana”

“Yeah, you and me, let’s protect everyone”

With most of our loot distribution done, we decided to hear all the details from our new comrades, Asuna and Takanashi-san.

“As you’ve probably noticed in the fight, I’m a Dualwielder”

“Hey hey, how’s that different from a Swordsman? Is it that Two-Sword Style thing?”

“Yeah, exactly”

Natsukawa-san’s simple guess seems to have hit home. I see, she was holding a long and a short sword because of that Two-Sword Style.

“So what happens when you got just one?”

“It’s not like I’m suddenly powerless. Thanks to my vocation, even someone inexperienced as me can show master-class skill”

No, you’ve been strong to begin with, Asuna. She didn’t have the arrogance to call herself master-class, but nonetheless, her skill was much higher compared to the average highschooler.

But that too, is perhaps just as expected of the only daughter of the esteemed Kenzaki clan known for thier sworsmanship. In terms of sword skills, she has recieved training much harsher than myself. Actually, if we had a no holds

barred, serious match, I couldn't say if a well tempered guy like me is guaranteed to win. The match would be decided by luck and other factors. In other words, it's 50–50. Sword in hand, I believe Kenzaki Asuna to be the strongest highschool girl in all of Japan.

Incidentally, leaving aside strength, Asuna is quite the looker as well. Long-slit, sharp and composed eyes, in addition to a gallant, disciplined visage, makes her popular amongst peers of both sexes. No actually, she's more of a hot-topic among the girls. Standing at over 170 cm (5'7") , the only girls taller than her in class would be Futaba-san and Kizaki-san from volleyball team. Yet, despite her long legs becoming well toned from daily training, her figure draws well defined curves establishing her womanhood.^[3]

(TN: I recently found a good reference to the described eyes, like, long-slit, droopy, cat-like *etc.*)

With a beautiful appearance, and supermodel-like figure, there's no way Asuna wouldn't be sought out. It's natural that Hiroki fell for her. But those intense turf wars between him and his rivals in love, the girls who called Asuna their Onee-sama, was a bit surprising to say the least.^[4]

Well, I can't really say I'm excluded from that sort of carnage either I guess.

During 1st year (10th grade) , I had accidentally accepted a challenge from her due to a misunderstanding, and actually ended up winning. She then said, "Now that you've beaten me, I'll accept you as my fiance", like it was some hidden tradition of the Kenzaki clan, causing a whole other uproar.

It's kind of absurd deciding about marriage partners from a mere sword match, and the talks of engagements and what not were safely laid to rest. Asuna too would prefer to marry not me, but someone who she actually loves; she should in fact.

Anyway, the girl called Kenzaki Asuna, is an important friend and a girl I get along with well. And presently, she's also a comrade I can leave my back to.

"Well, having two makes it much easier to use battle arts though. As of now, I'm definitely stronger with two swords than one"

"Uh-huh, that means, we've got to get you another good one don't we"

“We’re lucky enough to get even one this good. The second one, I’ll settle for a rusted sword no problem”

“Hold it right there, Asuna-chan! Now’s the time for Kotori to show her mettle!!”^[5]

(TN: Kotori-tan refers to herself in the third person~)

The one suddenly wedging herself into the conversation is Takanashi-san whom we had protected in the fight just now.

“Kotori, you mean, we can use it?”

“Yep, Sakura-chan and Class Rep said they had some extra core”

I see, understands her partner Asuna. I have not a clue what’s going on.

“Erm, Takanashi-san’s vocation, what was it again?”

“Ahem, lo and behold! For Kotori’s vocation, it is the one, the only—”

“She’s a Sage”

“Waah!? So mean, Asuna-chan! You took my big moment!!”

Cause you were getting cocky, Asuna coldly replies, at whom Takanashi-san started furiously swinging her little arms. The scene brings a smile to the face.

“And, a Sage is?”

“You see~, a Sage, that is someone that~—”

“Yeah, she’s got no fighting ability, but she has a number of useful powers. The novice skills are—”

“Waah! Stop that already!!”

Ancient Language Deciphering: basic	Can read the ancient language. Limited to third-class.
Simple Remodelling	Carry out simplified remodelling. Understanding and Clarification. Disassembly and reassembly.
Sacred Tongue: “Word of Rejection”	Can translate speech with intention into the sacred tongue. Limited to words meaning rejection.

“There’s also one acquired skill”

(TN: 古代語解読・序 — Kodaigo Kaidoku: Jo— Ancient Language Deciphering: basic *ie.* babelfish

簡易錬成陣 — Kani Renseijin — Simple Remodelling *ie.* magical ‘crafting’

神聖言語「拒絶の言葉」— Shinsei Gengo “Kyojetsu no Kotoba”— Sacred Tongue: “Word of Rejection” *ie.* fus ro dah

魔力解析 — Maryoku Kaiseki — Mana Analysis... better explanations right after.)

Would be the 4 skills possessed by Sage, Takanashi-san.

“And, what do these powers do specifically?”

“See that fountain over there? The fairy square’s fountain actually has a hidden feature. And to use that feature, you have to know how to read the ancient language”

That’d be where Ancient Language Deciphering: basic comes into play.

“That feature being?”

“Like repairing equipment, or making new ones. All we need is some suitable materials and Kotori’s mana.”

Apparently she can find out if those materials are suitable using Mana Analysis. Also, she seems to understand some other things with that skill too, but let’s put that aside for now.

“Lastly, with Simple Remodelling, we can activate the fountain”

“So it’s the fountain doing it and not her skill?”

“We tried that too. Results: with the same weapon and same materials, there’s a large difference in quality. We think that this fountain has a high level Remodelling feature, but we can only use it via the Simple Remodelling novice skill”

Meaning, even if you did the same actions as Takanashi-san, it wouldn’t work unless you have a skill related to remodelling.

“Asuna, I didn’t think you were into games and stuff?”

“No, all this are things Kousaka thought up”

Stepped into a landmine there. My chest hurts. Hiroki, that guy was really into games huh. That reminds me, I never returned that game I borrowed.

“Anyway, the fact of the matter is, with Kotori here, we can repair our weapons and make new ones. Only, we didn’t have much in terms of materials, including cores, until now, and I ended up using rusted swords”

On the other hand, as long as we have the materials, we can make as many powerful weapons as we want. This is a really useful skill in a dungeon where we aren’t guaranteed any supplies.

“And what does Word of Rejection do?”

“It’s somewhat iffy. Apparently, when Kotori says something like *stop*, or *get away*, it can stop monsters intent on attacking”

And if she shouts with strong willpower, she can apparently blow them away as well. And not only one, but many at a time. In addition, it’s not only limited to monsters, but ranged attacks like stones or arrows shot at her are also included in things blown away.

It sounds like an amazing magic, but it only works for things aimed at Takanashi-san herself, so she can’t use it for support us in the frontlines. Though the concept of Rejection should be between her and the enemy only, conveniently stopping only the enemy seems to be tough. Worst case, she could accidentally stop an ally mid-battle.

It’s dangerous to use carelessly, so Takanashi-san has been only using it for self-defense.

“I’m guessing she could do more with it when she learns new Sacred Tongues... but right now, we can’t use it in fights at all”

“No, it’s great that she can use for protecting herself. But the real amazing part of Takanashi-san’s power, it’s how she can create new weapons. Right now we’ve got a decent amount of cores, so she can probably make do with those”

“Right, so let’s get Kotori to— huh, Kotori, you’re crying?”

“Uu, Uuu!! Asuna-chan you dummy!! (baka) ”

What's up with her, Asuna and I both tilt our heads, at which point Natsukawa-san swoops in to the rescue.

“Heey Kotori-chan, you can do this. Do that remodel(?) thingy here and you can show Souma-kun your good side”

“R-really~, *ehehe*, Kotori can get Souma-kun to praise her?”

“Yup, that’s right, he’ll be super happy”

“Really, re~ally... *Ehehe*, kay, Kotori’s gonna give it her all!”

Wow, I didn’t hear what they were saying, but Takanashi-san seems to have gotten back her motivation. As you’d expected from her close friend Natsukawa-san.

Tell the truth, it’s not like I’m that close to Takanashi-san to begin with. Sakura, Class Rep, Natsukawa-san, Asuna, she’s close enough to all 4 others here to call them by first name, but she hasn’t had much interaction with me. Or rather, it’s because she’s usually in a cicle of girls only.

So for me, Takanashi-san only has an image of a cute, bright and energetic girl. Well, getting to know her, anyone would know that description to be exactly accurate.

Standing as small as Reina, Takanashi-san has a similarly youthful face. Her hairstyle also being twin-tailed. Naturally, her hair color is black, not blond like Reina’s. It really suits her. I shouldn’t say this, but she’s just like a gradeschooler.

But the fundamental difference between her and Reina, that would be in their chest size. The so-called Busty Loli (loli kyonyuu) , is the term a friend of mine used. Almost deliriously. That, *Kotori-chan, she truly possesses the trait fulfilling a miracle of Man’s desires, the Busty Loli*. No but, since Takanashi-san is the same age as us, she’s can’t be a loli I think. About the bustiness, that I can’t deny.^[7]

Anyway, with a baby-face, along with a bust that doesn’t match her petite figure, she too was a hot-topic in a different meaning from Asuna. With a 100% approval rating amongst the boys to boot.

As for the girls, some jealous of her popularity would call her “sly”, or “conceited”, or “poser” among other things.

Of course, starting with Sakura, Takanashi-san always had a bunch of reliable friends around her, so there’d been no case of it devolving into bullying. I don’t approve of it, facing one with an appearance as blessed as that of Takanashi-san, I suppose it’s only human to feel some level of ugly emotion.

“Well then, Souma-kun, lend your sword to Kotori please!”

“Yeah, I’ll leave it to y—”

“I forgot to mention, there’s a chance Kotori’s remodelling can fail”

“... What happens when it fails?”

“Naturally it breaks. So bad that you can’t ever use it again”

“Takanashi-san, I change my mind, please do this rusted one first”

“Kay, no problem!”

After that, Takanashi-san cheerfully tossed the rusted sword into the fountain, and began the ritual of remodelling.

As we had just overcome a battle with close to a hundred Goma along with a Boss Goma, it was high time for some well deserved rest. We collected all the comparatively better weapons from the Goma, and since Takanashi-san could repair those, we needed to wait for that too.

Of course, washing the dirt off our clothes and bodies was crucial psychologically as well as hygienically. In other words, it was time for a bath.

“Woah, Sakura-chan, your skin is so pretty~”

“S-stop Kotori, don’t touch me there”

“I’m jealous of Sakura’s figure, but Class Rep has it good too”

“What are you saying Asuna, compared to me, you definitely win”

“No, they’ve gotten bigger again see, honestly, they’re in the way when I’m fighting”

“Not jealous, I’m not jealous at all...”

“What’s wrong Class Rep, are you alright?”

“She’s not you know. Ryouko-chan’s a bit sensitive about that after all”

“About what?”

“*Nihaha*, of course, it’s about her boobs!”

“Wh-what the, Minami!”

“But Ryouko-chan, you can’t be jealous of Asuna-chan when right here, there someone so much, greater—”

“KyaAAAAAA!?”

“Th-this sheer volume, my hands look tiny!?”

“Minami, enough is enough!”

“Minami-chan you perv (ecchi) !!”

“*Nyaha*, my bad, you two, I’m sorry! So wait, not there, wai— Kyaaa!!”

Fun-filled voices rung about.

Yes, right now, the 5 girls were in the middle of bathing using the fairy square’s fountain. Naturally, I, being the only guy present, was driven away. It’s of course dangerous to wander around alone in the dungeon, so I’m standing near the entrance to the fairy square facing the wall. If by chance, I were to turn around, I don’t think I would be viewing paradise. The girls are likely washing up on the opposite side so as to be out of view as much as possible.

Nevertheless, I am not so much a fool as to attempt turning around.

“You understand, nii-san? You are absolutely not, to try peeping”/

Sakura had decreed.

I am too, a man. A healthy highschool boy, with the natural urges that come with being one. However, as a man, I’m not stupid enough to want to peep while putting their trust to the test.

Even still, that Sakura being so wary of me, am I really that untrustworthy?

“Nii-san, at times like this, you tend to cause trouble someway or other, so you need particular attention!”

I was reminded as such. Certainly, there was that time like our middle school field trip, or that time when we went to the beach with some friends, I inadvertantly ended up walking in on them while they were chinging; certainly, those kind of accidental events did happen... but, but still, when she's so plainly wary of me, as her brother, I'm just saddened.

"Fuuh, tranquility, tranquility"

Challenge accepted, Sakura. I shall now become the noblest of gentlemen. There shall be no case, of me laying eyes on your, or the other girls' naked bodies.

And, after painfully passing the time, from their voices, it seemed that their washing had come to an end, and they had began dressing up. Alright, I passed the test— I relaxed, but right then,

"KyaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!"

A scream like the tearing of silk echoes. This is, exactly the same, same as that fearful, despairing cry I heard before facing the Boss Goma. It was Takanashi-san.

Hearing such a tense shriek, my relaxed state of mind switched into that of battle-readiness. It can't be, did a monster suddenly appeared here in the fairy square? Taking up the sword at my waist, I quickly turned.

"What happenned, Takanashi-sa—nn!?"

"Nooo!! Save me Souma-kuuun!"

There, a teary-eyed Takanashi-san was running to me in white underwear. The almost dazzling soft, porcelain maiden's skin, and those springing twin hills, they scroched these eyes of mine. As if she'd gotten the wrong size. They seemed close to spilling out.

"Uaah!? Wait, Takanashi-san, your clothes!"

"Fueeen!(crying sound) "

Before I know what was what, I was clung onto by a Takanashi-san in her underwear, being hugged tightly. T-this is bad, I can't draw my sword like this. No, not that. This soft feeling on this body of mine is, dammit, not that either!

“Please wait, Kotori! Nii-san is over th—”

“Jeez, didn’t I say it’s dangerous to run off like that?”

“Sorry sorry, Ryouko-chan meant well alright?”

As I was bound by Takanashi-san, and had entered a state of complete immobility, new pairs of underwear kept popping into my eyes one after another. Pink, black, sky-blue, the girls appearing in underwear of all these colors, as family, as friends, even if I didn’t particularly like them, they would only appear cuter, more beautiful than any model in fashion magazines.

In other words, Sakura, and Asuna, and Natsukawa-san, these three had appeared before me in their lingerie.^[8]

(TN: (This is a joke note) If we consider the listing of colors being not randomized, but in the order that the girls appear in, Sakura should be Pink, Asuna → Black, and Minami → light blue. With Kotori obviously being White, we got the official colors of these girls’ pantsu. Yes, this is important. According to this, pantsu can tell a lot about a girl. Well, not irl, but in these trope-ridden web novels, its bound to say at least 50% of their personalities. Furthermore, the fact that only these girls (no Class Rep/Ryouko) appeared at this juncture is, I believe, a literary karma, plot armor type of thing. As for who’s plot armor it’s supposed to be, of course it’s Ryouichi’s. You know, Yuuto (Hero’s) best friend who kicks ass with him. It’s been established that he’s being shipped with Ryouko, so Yuuto cannot have ecchi moments with her. This is because it would turn into a form of NTR. Now, we know how adamant the author is about heroines and NTR, so I’m expecting no such development in the future. And, maybe I’m going off in a tangent here, but this also establishes what sort of girls are accepted in a “Hero’s” harem. With top-tier looks, it’s not big enough to have their characters overlap, they even got different ways of calling *him*. You’ve got Sakura the incest-bait (that this one guy in the comments keep complaining about) who’s all about that *Nii-san*, it’s got a level of closeness appropriate for a highschooler sister who’s not afraid to be close to her brother. Minami, the genki girl, and Kotori, the token loli, who go with the normal *Souma-kun*, they’re not as close, but still top-tier beauties who, dare I say, belong to his harem. Finally, there’s Asuna, the cool one, who makes do with

just *Souma*, no honorific = +closeness, no first name = –closeness, but that’s just because she’s the cool one; calling him Yuuto would be too affectionate for her personality. Now, we all know Sakura’s the winner. Since Yuuto always seems to give her special attention. Even when referring to people in his mind, he designates Sakura separately, like his very own *Best Girl*. Her pantsu are also pink, so of course she wins. As for black, err Asuna, she’s the dark horse, the closest rival for Sakura, and also has the trait of fiancée and matching activity(kendo). Hiroki being killed off gives the perfect excuse to add her into the harem without hero having guilty feelings. Additionally, Her bold behaviour makes her a fan favorite and she’d be, in another story, the *best girl* the audience majority loves. Natsukawa, miss blue ranger, has no chance. She’s the equivalent of the green haired girl who never (almost) wins. Her and white, Kotori, just make up the numbers, cause harems are never just 2. Kotori is here for the loli-service... and the oppai-service. Of course, we’ve got Reina, the other loli, who’s allegedly also in the harem with the foreigner-service. But she hasn’t appeared much yet, so I shan’t say anymore. As a final aside, Ryouko who says *Yuuto-kun* only shows that she’s a close female friend, but someone who musn’t be touched... at least if Ryouichi doesn’t end up dying.)

“Kyaa! Nii-san, why—”

“Wh-, S-Souma...”

“*Fuee!*?”

I guess these three hurriedly tried to chase after Takanashi-san who has suddenly run off. So hurried that they forgot that they too were in their underwear same her her.

“*Fueeen*, Souma-kuun, Kotori was, she was soo scaared”

“... Nii-san, what might this be?”

A dangerous air drifts from Sakura all of a sudden. *Aah*, I wonder why, she’s plainly covering her chest with her arm like girl’s do, but this cute sister of mine, I can’t help but be terrified of her.

“J-just wait Sakura, this is a misunderstanding!”

I shouldn’t have made such blunder. Just that, Takanashi-san had screamed so

loudly that I thought it was an emergency. That's why, being embraced by Takanashi-san in her underwear right now is not from my intention, but by her own free will. I have nothing to feel guilty about.

“Well, I am in fact engaged to Souma, so him seeing me in my underwear... is no b-big deal...”

“*Nihaha*, Sorry, Souma-kun, you're not that happy seeing li'l old me right”

With faces red and eyes watery, I can't feel too convinced you know. Sorry you two, I've caused you a lot of shame.

I promise I'll make it up to you so please... please help stop this dangerous Sakura.

“Wait, calm down Sakura, this is an unforeseen accident. I just—”

“Nii-san you, you jerk (baka) !!”

Aa, so Lux Sagitta, also works without a bow, I thought as I was enveloped in dazzling light.

[1] Counter & Reflector are as is, simple. 一の正拳 — Ichi no Sei Ken — Righteous Fist. As can be implied, his house is a dojo.

[2] 双剣士 — Dualwielder, only in the sword sense.

[3] I recently found a good reference to the described eyes, like, long-slit, droopy, cat-like *etc.*

[5] Kotori-tan refers to herself in the third person~

[6] 古代語解読・序 — Kodaigo Kaidoku: Jo— Ancient Language Deciphering: basic *ie.* babelfish

簡易錬成陣 — Kani Renseijin — Simple Remodelling *ie.* magical 'crafting'
神聖言語「拒絶の言葉」— Shinsei Gengo “Kyojetsu no Kotoba”— Sacred Tongue: “Word of Rejection” *ie.* fus ro dah

魔力解析 — Maryoku Kaiseki — Mana Analysis... better explanations right after.

[8] (This is a joke note) If we consider the listing of colors being not randomized, but in the order that the girls appear in, Sakura should be Pink, Asuna → Black, and Minami → light blue. With Kotori obviously being White, we got the official colors of these girls' pantsu. Yes, this is important. According to this, pantsu can tell a lot about a girl. Well, not irl, but in these trope-ridden web novels, its bound to say at least 50% of their personalities. Furthermore, the fact that only these girls (no Class Rep/Ryouko) appeared at this juncture is, I believe, a literary karma, plot armor type of thing. As for who's plot armor it's supposed to be, of course it's Ryouichi's. You know, Yuuto (Hero's) best friend who kicks ass with him. It's been established that he's being shipped with Ryouko, so Yuuto cannot have ecchi moments with her. This is because it would turn into a form of NTR. Now, we know how adamant the author is about heroines and NTR, so I'm expecting no such development in the future. And, maybe I'm going off in a tangent here, but this also establishes what sort of girls are accepted in a "Hero's" harem. With top-tier looks, it's not big enough to have their characters overlap, they even got different ways of calling *him*. You've got Sakura the incest-bait (that this one guy in the comments keep complaining about) who's all about that *Nii-san*, it's got a level of closeness appropriate for a highschooler sister who's not afraid to be close to her brother. Minami, the genki girl, and Kotori, the token loli, who go with the normal *Souma-kun*, they're not as close, but still top-tier beauties who, dare I say, belong to his harem. Finally, there's Asuna, the cool one, who makes do with just *Souma*, no honorific = +closeness, no first name = -closeness, but that's just because she's the cool one; calling him Yuuto would be too affectionate for her personality. Now, we all know Sakura's the winner. Since Yuuto always seems to give her special attention. Even when refering to people in his mind, he designates Sakura separately, like his very own *Best Girl*. Her pantsu are also pink, so of course she wins. As for black, err Asuna, she's the dark horse, the closest rival for Sakura, and also has the trait of fiancée and matching activity(kendo). Hiroki being killed off gives the perfect excuse to add her into the harem without hero having guilty feelings. Additionally, Her bold behaviour makes her a fan favorite and she'd be, in another story, the *best girl* the audience majority loves. Natsukawa, miss blue ranger, has no chance. She's the equivalent of the green haired girl who never (almost) wins. Her and white,

Kotori, just make up the numbers, cause harems are never just 2. Kotori is here for the loli-service... and the oppai-service. Of course, we've got Reina, the other loli, who's allegedly also in the harem with the foreigner-service. But she hasn't appeared much yet, so I shan't say anymore. As a final aside, Ryouko who says *Yuuto-kun* only shows that she's a close female friend, but someone who musn't be touched... at least if Ryouichi doesn't end up dying.

Chapter 38: Harem Leveling

“— Me, Asuna, and Natsukawa-san. The three of us will be vanguard. Sakura and Class Rep are in rear support. And Takanashi-san will stay close to the them, so we have her protected”

We decided everyone's positions in our new 6 member party, before restarting our dungeon capture.

There were a few *accidents* here and there, but now we're all set. Takanashi-san's remodeling had borne excellent results, and our dirty clothes were done being washed and mended.

In the first place, the reason why this incident, that is, why Takanashi-san had a maddened runaway, happened was because Class Rep had applied Mimesis Worms on everyone's clothes so that they'd get fixed while they washed up. She had thought it to be a beneficial action, but Takanashi-san went and carelessly tried picking up her uniform instead of the prepared gym clothes. This is where she ended up touching the object of her fears, the insect, the Mimesis Worm.

A sad tale. Nobody was at fault, with everyone being only a victim, an unfortunate conclusion.

“I'm really sorry Yuuto-kun, I never imagined it'd turn out like *that*”

Apologized Class Rep garbed in her gym clothes in such a nonchalant expression that I felt a bit of anger boiling up. That damn Class Rep, it's because she hadn't had her underwear seen that she's so awfully composed.

Anyway, let's forget grudges of the past, and focus on the dungeon before us.

Our originally stable 4-member party now has the powerful swordsman, that is Asuna, and though she can't fight, she can help by improving and replenishing our equipment, and support us in a bunch of other ways, Takanashi-san. These two would make us all the more strong.

“This area appears to be mainly Skeletons”

It has been an hour since we started walking. And with the only monster we’ve encountered in that time being Skeletons, I can agree with Sakura’s observation.

Despite being somewhat the representative of all weak monsters, the Skeletons appearing here had weapons of much better quality, and with their newfound swift and powerful movements, they turned out to be quite powerful enemies. Herded into groups, or rather I should say platoons, of 5 to 10, they even showed signs of organized movement.

And deserving special attention is the captain of the Skeletons leading those platoon. The troops wore thoroughly blackened (they were likely white before), tattered surcoats, and equipped themselves with iron swords and spears with only a tinge of rust. However, the Captain Skeleton had on an iron helm, and with body armor, gauntlets, and leg pieces, it came fully protected. The great halberd it held was not rusted, but had a dull gleam of steel, clearly displaying good quality. In addition, it also had a round iron shield, strengthening its defense even further.

“I don’t think my Slash can go through all of that”

“Right, it really looks tough with all that armor. Souma, you’re lucky you got that Break”

“Yeah, it’s like in a game, blunt force is more effective on Skeletons every time”

When that Boss Goma was swinging around its Demon Sword, at times, as if releasing a battle art, it made a noticeably powerful strike. Even if that didn’t hit you, it made a shockwave so strong that just being nearby would almost get you blown away. That would be its Break.

Since it was using that move, I must have acquired it when I beat it.

“But what’s being really useful here is Sakura’s light-attribute right?”

This too was exactly like in games. The Skeleton, a monster of the genre known as undead, is greatly weakened when against the light attribute. It’s a fact we’ve known since the time when it was just me and Sakura.

With a simple Lux Sagitta, the Skeletons crumble and turn to ash. The aiming doesn't matter. Just by sliding against an arm or leg, the arrow of light causes annihilation.

It's probably from all the experience fighting, but Sakura attained some new skills.

Lux Shield (Shield of Light)	A low class defense magic of the light attribute. A shield of brilliant white light guards against evil.
Lux Blast (Light Cannon)	A low class area-attack magic of the light attribute. A beam of brilliant white light cleanses evil. ^[1]

=====

| Lux Shield (Shield of Light) | | A low class defense magic of the light attribute. A shield of brilliant white light guards against evil. |

| Lux Blast (Light Cannon) | | A low class area-attack magic of the light attribute. A beam of brilliant white light cleanses evil.[/tn] |

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(TN: 光盾 — Hikari Tate — Lux Shield and 光砲 — Hikari Hoo — Lux Blast)

In short, a shield and a beam of light.

As for shield made with magic, I've already seen this type of defence magic with Class Rep's Eis Shield. Though named a shield, it isn't one that you take in hand, but basically, it's a wall of around the caster's height that springs out.^[2]

(TN: I wonder if I mentioned this before, but stuff I've been TLing as Ice was pronounced like *aizu* and not *aisu* so I was very troubled what to use instead. I did a bit more research now and found in German Eiz, meaning Ice, has the same pronunciation, so I believe This is what the translation is meant to be. My problem was looking for ice in latin roots because ignis, terra, aqua, aer, are all latin, but there's nothing in latin that sounds like *aizu*, and I was stuck there. Incidentally, I also checked what Kuro no Maou TLs did and it's either Ice or Aiz (no idea why). Anyway, TLDR, ICE → EIS (pronounced like ice with a Z))

But its size can be adjusted by utilizing mana with expertise. Same goes for the toughness. Also, it's possible to create it separated from yourself, thus being able to provide defenses for the vanguard for example.

Class Rep and Sakura, both reliable mages, can now not only dish out support fire, but in tougher times, with hard to reach enemies, they can also provide precise defensive options, making combat all the more safe and smooth.

The other one, Lux Blast, simply ups our firepower as a party. Class Rep also has this type of area-attack magic. Her Eis Blast, which she can use to take down enemies within a certain scope all at once, so we knew Lux Blast's effect right away.

Where Class Rep's brings forth cold air like a blizzard, Sakura unleashes a scorching flash.

The troops of Skeletons finding us and coming with a frontal attack are exterminated all at once with just one of Sakura's Lux Blasts.

And in the unlikely event that they make it through that preemptive barrage, there's all of us in the vanguard squad lying in wait with all our weapons applied with Holy Enchant. Facing our sacred blades, even if they're slightly stronger, or coming in groups, Skeletons don't stand a chance.

"—Ah, I just learned a new skill"

"Ooooh! You go Sakura-chan!"

"She's been at it a lot, so the levelups are faster too huh"

Taking a side-glance at the rearguard team happy for Sakura's steady progress, us in the vanguard are picking through the defeated Skeletons.

"Oh, lucky me, found a core even though it's a Skeleton"

"We don't have to cut into any bodies, and only break a few bones to get it. Skeletons make life so easy"

I guess it's because they're stronger, even Skeletons are dropping cores. These are located mostly inside the skull, so looking at the red glow leaking from the eye sockets or from between its teeth makes it easy to know if it has one or not. The Skeleton captain is guaranteed to have one, and the troopers also drop them occasionally.

Core collection has been progressing well all in all. At this rate, we may have enough to use as energy for the Divine Gate to escape from here, and plus, a

certain amount can be used with Takanashi-san’s remodeling to strengthen ourselves as well.

“Hmm, this guy’s halberd seems to be better quality... Let’s switch up then”

Moreover, getting some proper weaponry is great. I don’t know how long I can last with just my one sword from that knight we found. Of course, I carry a sub weapon like a knife or short-sword, but having another main is never a bad thing.

Though not as well as the sword, I have learned how to handle weapons like a spear or naginata from jii-san (grandpa) . We pretty much had a jack-of-all kind of code for martial arts.

Of course, I’ve never used a halberd, that’s like an axe-tipped spear, or any Western weapons of the sort, but well, as I’m using it now, it doesn’t give me major issues. It can cut as well as stab, so it’ll be convenient in the long run.

“— Yay! Kotori got new skills too! Thankyou God~!”

Come the third time since entering the Skeleton area that Takanashi-san was using the fairy square’s fountain to start her weapon repair, she raised joyful cheers.

From all the battles, everyone has been steadily leveling up, with Sakura getting the most out, but it was a fact the non combat-oriented Takanashi-san was being left out and feeling a bit envious. Asuna was also saying how Takanashi-san not getting new skills was making the person herself more and more anxious. She was worried about her too.

“You did? That’s great Kotori. So what are they?”

“Ehehe, check these out—”

Standard Remodeling	Carry out standard remodeling. In decoding all of creation, it is but the first step.
Ancient Language Deciphering: proficient	Can read the ancient language. Limited to second-class.

=====

| Standard Remodeling | | Carry out standard remodeling. In decoding all of

creation, it is but the first step. |

|Ancient Language Deciphering: proficient| |Can read the ancient language.
Limited to second-class. |

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“With this, Kotori can make even more amazing weapons!”

Seems like the newly acquired skills are the superior versions of Simple Remodeling and Ancient Language Deciphering: basic respectively. All our weapon remodeling and strengthening has been done so far using these two skills so it’s appropriate to say she has improved.

Looking as how excited she is, I think we can expect the remodeling to produce weapons of even higher performance with the same materials as before. One more good news would be that the failure rate for it was dropping significantly. “It’ll be indestructible!” Takanashi-san was boasting.

“That’s great, Takanashi-san, I’ll be expecting a bit”

“Yep! For Souma-kun, Kotori’ll make the best weapon ever, and gift it to you!”

“Thanks”

She must be really happy being useful to everyone, her brilliant smile going ear to ear is a pleasant scene to see.

“... Nii-san, may I ask what you are doing with that hand?”

“Ha! This is, you know”

I somehow ended up stroking her head. I mean, her head’s at the perfect spot too. Plus, Takanashi-san doesn’t seem to hate it, in fact, she looks so happy like the the pet dog we kept a long time ago.

“*You know*, I would know what exactly?”

“I’m sorry”

I can’t say I wasn’t getting carried away. It really is a shame. As I lift away my hand, Takanashi-san also making a somewhat sullen face, that must be my imagination.

“— So, Kotori can make stronger weapons with her remodeling now. With

that in mind, should we try re-working them?”

“Right, let’s make base here, and walk around the premises, see if we can find more cores and stuff”

Hmm, hmmm, concentrates Takanashi-san in an afflicted voice facing while the fountain. She is focusing on her remodelling, while the rest of us discuss the plan.

“I agree with Class Rep. Kotori’s remodelling will take a while. It’ll be more constructive to get some good materials rather than just waiting for her to finish”

“Yep, me too, I have a few things I wanna try out in real fights, practice makes perfect right!”

“Still, we just can’t leave Kotori here alone just because the square is supposed to be safe... Someone should stay. Other than nii-san of course.”

“Eh, what’s wrong with me?”

“I agree”

“Same here”

“No other way about it”

“Heyy! Kotori doesn’t agreee!!”

“It’s decided. Agreed, nii-san?”

I can’t fight the majority ruling. I haven’t a clue why only I was forbidden to stay with Takanashi-san, but if they’re this adamant, I’ll have to yield.

Well, I’d be worried for the others if I stayed back. Maybe Sakura already foresaw that. As expected of this sister of mine, or rather, my thought patterns must be too simplistic.

“Right, if you’re all set, let’s head out—”

With that, we spent the next two days with the current fairy square as a base, and gave it our all for the so called leveling. The results of which are as follows:

Souma Yuuto • Hero



Learned skills	
Hi Step	Boosts mobility. A single kick birthing afterimages, trampling space itself.
Storm Kick	A foundation of the Souma-Style Unarmed Combat Arts. A leg that is fast, heavy
Body Buster	A foundation of the Souma-Style Unarmed Combat Arts. Grab, break, throw.
Impact	Area-damage attack. A devastating blow that spreads around further shockwaves.

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| Learned skills |

| Hi Step | | Boosts mobility. A single kick birthing afterimages, trampling space itself. |

| Storm Kick | | A foundation of the Souma-Style Unarmed Combat Arts. A leg that is fast, heavy |

| Body Buster | | A foundation of the Souma-Style Unarmed Combat Arts. Grab, break, throw. |

| Impact | | Area-damage attack. A devastating blow that spreads around further shockwaves. |

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Acquired skills	
Fortify Bones	Full-body Strengthening. A sturdy skeleton improves power overall. ^[3]

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| Acquired skills |

| Fortify Bones | | Full-body Strengthening. A sturdy skeleton improves power overall.[/tn] |

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(TN: Hi Step and Impact are as is.

嵐蹴り — Arashi Keri — Storm Kick

体崩し — Tai Kuzushi — Body Buster

活性骨身 — Kassei Honemi — Fortify Bones)

That’s how it turned out for me. As I was leaping and jumping around with Hi Walk, at some point, I realized I could kick into the air too, that is, perform the

fabled double jump, and so ended up learning Hi Step.

Other than that, as I used some of the already ingrained Souma-Style martial arts techniques depending on the situation, following Righteous Fist, the two foundations of kicking and throwing were also mixed in with the learned skills.

That and there’s Fortify Bones. This has to be from fighting Skeletons. Full-body Strengthening may not sound like much, but a boost in physical strength really comes in handy.

On the other hand, Sakura didn’t get any more new skills. She must’ve already gotten the maximum growth she could with Skeletons. Well, fighting the same enemies over and over makes for great practice with magic, she’s had a good deal of that with the skills she has already learned.

Kisaragi Ryouko • Class Re— I mean, Ice Mage, yup.

Eis Curis Sagitta (Frost Spear)	Ice-attribute magic of the intermediate level. A large spear of ice pierces the enemy.
Summon Eis Elemental	Summons an Eis Elemental of beginner level. ^[4]

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| Eis Curis Sagitta (Frost Spear) | | Ice-attribute magic of the intermediate level. A
| large spear of ice pierces the enemy. |
| Summon Eis Elemental | | Summons an Eis Elemental of beginner level.[/tn] |
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(TN: Eis Curis Sagitta is as is. 氷精霊召喚 — Kouri Seirei Shoukan — Summon Eis Elemental... I’ve changed Kris → Curis, blah blah latin for spear.)

Class Rep was also mastering her newly learned skills at the same rate as Sakura. Eis Curis Sagitta can be said to be a superior version of the attack magic she has become so adept at using. So learning this one next was a matter of course.

Summon Eis Elemental is a new type of magic for Class Rep too. This summoned Eis Elemental is a blue, glowing, mist-like sphere of around 30 cm in diameter. Like a fairy, it has wing-like parts, and as for whether it is a living creature or only a clump of mana, it certainly begs the question. This thing doesn’t speak, and nor does it make any sounds, but will move according to

Class Rep’s will.

The elemental itself can’t attack, or strictly speaking, though it can’t utilize its internal ice mana to freeze anything, it can go and burst near an enemy’s head or near the legs, causing it to stop moving or become confused. It makes for a new kind of support we haven’t had before. Though, it’s not like we need much help with just Skeletons.

Kenzaki Asuna ▪ Dualweilder

Bone Cutter	Kenzaki-Style Sword Art. Even bones are severed with ease, a capable blade.
Quaking Drill	Kenzaki-Style Sword Art. A spin added to the thrust unleashes a shockwave.
Edge Shaver	Kenzaki-Style Sword Art. When locking blades, cut through and surpass the enemy.

=====

| Bone Cutter | | Kenzaki-Style Sword Art. Even bones are severed with ease, a capable blade. |

| Quaking Drill | | Kenzaki-Style Sword Art. A spin added to the thrust unleashes a shockwave. |

| Edge Shaver | | Kenzaki-Style Sword Art. When locking blades, cut through and surpass the enemy. |

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As Asuna got used to fighting Skeletons, *It’d be great if I could just cut through bones too*, she gained a skill matching her thoughts, and another move that makes a good impact to a bone body. Bone Cutter enters from the crown and has the force to cleanly split apart the spinal cord right down the middle. Furthermore, Quaking Drill grants a tremendous impact to the her blade, making bones scatter to bits when hit.

When attempting to take on enemy attacks, she learned the defensive Edge Shaver. Normally, Asuna would use her Sky Hop, a speed enhancing battle art that’s like a sister skill to Hi Step and Hi Walk, and carried out the strategies to always avoid enemy attacks. But she spent these two days training in relative safety to acquire Edge Shaver. Thinking of situations where defending would be crucial and preparing for such situations in advance isn’t a demerit at all.^[5]

(TN: 骨断ち — Hone Tachi — Bone Cutter
震い穿ち — Furui Ugachi — Quaking Drill
鎬削り — Kou Kuzuri — Edge Shaver
空跳ね — Kuu Hane — Sky Hop, this last one, may get proper name by author later, but it's like this for now.)

Incidentally, the Kenzaki-Style Sword Art tacked on to all the skill descriptions aren't from Asuna's family's style at all. It's unknown whether the God of Dualwielders did it randomly, or that actually the Art of the Kenzaki-Style also emerged in this otherworld. Asuna seems to be wishing for the latter case.

Natsukawa Minami • Thief

Hi Step	Boosts mobility. A single kick birthing afterimages, trampling space itself.
Repel	Repel enemy attacks using weapons or armor.
Dual Slash	Two back-to-back Slashes
Shadow Pull	Tricks the enemy into seeing a clone for an instant. A form of illusion art (genjutsu)
Shadow Lace	When moving in shadows, sneaking ability rises.
Hide Attack	Aiming from right behind, the enemy is struck precisely in the vitals ^[6]

=====
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Hide Attack		Aiming from right behind, the enemy is struck precisely in the vitals[/tn]
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(TN: Hi Step, Dual Slash, Hide Attack are as is.
弾き — Hajiki — Repel, is same as what Futaba-sama had.
影残し — Kage Nokoshi — Shadow Pull (lit. Shadow Leaving)

Looks like the one who got the most new skills ended up being Natsukawa-san. Hi Step is the same as mine, and Repel is similar to Asuna’s Edge Shaver.

Dual Slash is a battle art borne out of her frustration of not being able to defeat a Skeleton in one hit, and so creates a combo with another. Shadow Pull can be used to mislead the enemy and attack in while they’re distracted. It can otherwise it can be useful for evading too. There’s this restriction of the clone only lasting a moment, but since Natsukawa-san’s namesake is her speed, I’m sure she can pull through.

Shadow Lace and Hide Attack came about after cases where we noticed the Skeletons while they didn’t see us, whereupon we could naturally perform a surprise attack. Using these two together, Natsukawa-san can take on and one-sidedly annihilate a group of around 5 or so of them. Her vocation is supposed to be Thief but she’s practically an Assassin at this point.

Seing Natsukawa-san, who never had any formal martial arts training like me or Asuna, doing so well in our frontlines, I’m again reminded of the concept known as talent. Asuna was even edging to recruit her as a student in the Kenzaki-Style once we get back to Japan.

Like that, we were leveling up at a great pace. At this point, I think any one of us could take on a whole platoon of Skeletons no problem.

And then, after sacrificing more than a hundred Skeletons to our cause, their cores and equipment underwent our Sage, that is Takanashi-san’s, special processing, and became newly made gear for ourselves.

“Whaff, I’m finally done with e~veryones things”

Great work, we all thank Takanashi-san for her efforts, while our upgraded weapons are passed around.

I’ll mention mine to start off:

Paladin’s Sword	A sword used by a certain paladin. It has an emblem of a red lion engraved on it.
Steel Halberd	A halberd forged from superior steel.
Iron Dagger	A general quality dagger.

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=====

Takanashi-san says the weapons’ names and descriptions pop into her head right after she’s done remodeling. Is the naming done by the Sage’s power or is it a function of the fountain? Well, it’s fine either way.

Anyway, that knight’s sword I had gotten back then was born anew as a Paladin’s Sword with a much sharper edge. After feeding in multiple halberds taken from the Skeleton captains, we got back one made of steel. We used up a decent amount of cores, so looking at the before-after, there’s a wide difference in quality.

I had asked for a throwing knife anticipating cases like with the Boss Dog, which is where the Iron Dagger comes in. It says general quality, but in a place where you can only get rusted blades from Skeletons, this is a good upgrade in its own right.

Oriental Bow of the Saintess	A bow used by the Saintess Sakura. It possesses a glint of light. [7]
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|Oriental Bow of the Saintess| | A bow used by the Saintess Sakura. It possesses a glint of light.[/tn]|

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“... Saintess Sakura *pfft*”

“W-what is the meaning of this embarrassing description, hey, Kotori!!”

“*Eeh~!* Not her fault, Kotori’s not the one thinking these up kay~!”

Somehow, the description is making out Sakura to be a genuine saintess. Before any vocation, she’s supposed to be a normal highschool girl. But the text makes it appear as if she has been a holy woman all her life.

That being said, though Takanashi-san’s remodeling didn’t change it’s outer

appearance, that of an archery club bow, there is currently a clear difference in its durability. And even if the string breaks, she can quickly fix it with a bit of remodeling.

“Sorry about your wand Ryouko-chan, looks like Kotori can’t handle magic weapons yet”

The long wand being used by our Ice Mage, Class Rep, is one we plundered from a Skeleton captain of the mage class. This class seems to be somewhat rare as we only encountered 3 during the recent leveling session. Luckily, on the 2nd time, it was shooting out clumps of ice magic everywhere, and after defeating it, we got a weapon for Class Rep.

“Right, magic wands may need special attention compared to normal weapons. Perhaps we’ll have to wait for the Remodeling skill to get stronger, or maybe you will need something like a Magic Remodeling skill”

“*Hmm*, Kotori’s wondering, any clue how she’s gonna learn it?”

“For now, just don’t tinker around with my wand alright? It’s my only weapon after all”

“Hey~! What do you take Kotori for, meanie~!”

Takanashi-san seems to be making a show of fuming in anger, but all of us have already seen how she tried to use the other 2, fire and wind attribute wands, and tried to combine them with her remodeling. We saw how it was a great big failure.

Leaving the wand upgrade as an assignment for the future, Asuna and Natsukawa-san’s equipment were also processed in due order.

Blade of Cleansing	A blade exorcised of its curse. Now it is not wickednes, but a holy light that grants it power.
Knight Saber	A single-edged blade used by Knights. Piercing or slashing, it serves its purpose.
Iron Sword	A general quality sword.
Iron Short-sword	A general quality short-sword.

=====

| Blade of Cleansing | | A blade exorcised of its curse. Now it is not wickednes, but a holy light that grants it power. |

| Knight Saber | | A single-edged blade used by Knights. Piercing or slashing, it serves its purpose. |

| Iron Sword | | A general quality sword. |

| Iron Short-sword | | A general quality short-sword. |

=====

Bandit Knife	A shiny knife suitable for threats as well as killing. A must-have for robbery and murder alike.
Kill Carver	A kitchen knife not for cuisine, but thirsting blood, it was reborn to kill.
Iron Short-sword	A general quality short-sword.
Iron Dagger	A general quality dagger. ^[8]

=====

| Bandit Knife | | A shiny knife suitable for threats as well as killing. A must-have for robbery and murder alike. |

| Kill Carver | | A kitchen knife not for cuisine, but thirsting blood, it was reborn to kill. |

| Iron Short-sword | | A general quality short-sword. |

| Iron Dagger | | A general quality dagger.[/tn] |

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(TN: 清めの太刀 — Kiyome no Tachi — Blade of Cleansing... or purification/exorcism.

人斬り包丁 — Hitogiri Houchou — Kill Carver (lit. Murder Kitchen-knife)

バンデッドナイフ — Bandeddo naifu — Bandit Knife, I tried to match it with the description, but should it be Banded Knife?)

Those were, respectively, Asuna and Natsukawa-san’s weapons. With the upgrades this time, we’ve completely gotten rid of any rust in our things, with the description now saying General Quality. Of course, Asuna’s two-sword style and Natsukawa-san’s dual-knife mains were made much stronger as well.

“Look at that, this swords glowing even without Holy Enchant on it”

“The description did say something to the likes of Sakura’s light fully purifying

it”

“Yeah, whatever it is, it’s a good sword if nothing else. This Knight Saber has a good feel too. With these I think I can really bring out my dualwielding potential”

Appreciating her great quality swords with a satisfied smile, Asuna strokes Takanashi-san’s head. Naturally, there isn’t a peep from Sakura. The heck, so it’s A-OK when it’s a girl?

“Right, so now that everyone’s got their things, you guys want to head out?”

“I’m satisfied with the results, so why not”

“Just come to Kotori once you get new materials, she’ll fix you right up!”

“Hey, hey you guys, why do my knives have these ominous descriptions, hey?”

Her eyes slightly damp, Natsukawa-san was questioning the large, bulky, survivalist fashion Bandit Knife, and also, though it was once a normal sized kitchen knife, it was now bigger, and more like a sword, she was questioning the Kill Carver held in her hands.

“Hey, Souma-kun! Why do only mine gotta be like this!”

Uaah, you’re asking me!? I didn’t wanna be involved. I was even planning to ignore it and head out... Crap, think think.

“Eh, well that’s...”

I peep to my right, Sakura just looks away. Trying left this time, theres Class Rep. She’s supposed to be Natsukawa-san’s best friend but, she too averts her eyes. Asuna’s looking at me as if expecting me to give a great answer, not a hint of support from there. Finally, the perpetrator who originally caused this mess with her nasty names and descriptions, Takanashi-san, she wasn’t even facing this way.

Guys, give me a break here. So this is that so-called womanly-pact thing huh. Scaaary... Yup, alright then, I’ll just have to try something and hope Natsukawa-san doesn’t get depressed.

“Well that’s cause, uh... you’re a Thief, right?”

“I, I’m not a bad Thief alright!! *Fueeen!*”

We spent the next 30 minutes before heading out consoling Natsukawa-san as she’d started crying.

[1] 光盾 — Hikari Tate — Lux Shield and 光砲 — Hikari Hoo — Lux Blast

[2] I wonder if I mentioned this before, but stuff I’ve been TLing as Ice was pronounced like *aizu* and not *aisu* so I was very troubled what to use instead. I did a bit more research now and found in German Eiz, meaning Ice, has the same pronunciation, so I believe This is what the translation is meant to be. My problem was looking for ice in latin roots because ignis, terra, aqua, aer, are all latin, but there’s nothing in latin that sounds like *aizu*, and I was stuck there. Incidentally, I also checked what Kuro no Maou TLs did and it’s either Ice or Aiz (no idea why). Anyway, TLDR, ICE → EIS (pronounced like ice with a Z)

[3] Hi Step and Impact are as is.

嵐蹴り — Arashi Keri — Storm Kick

体崩し — Tai Kuzushi — Body Buster

活性骨身 — Kassei Honemi — Fortify Bones

[4] Eis Curis Sagitta is as is. 氷精霊召喚 — Kouri Seirei Shoukan — Summon Eis Elemental... I’ve changed Kris → Curis, blah blah latin for spear.

[5] 骨断ち — Hone Tachi — Bone Cutter

震い穿ち — Furui Ugachi — Quaking Drill

鎬削り — Kou Kuzuri — Edge Shaver

空跳ね — Kuu Hane — Sky Hop, this last one, may get proper name by author later, but it’s like this for now.

[6] Hi Step, Dual Slash, Hide Attack are as is.

弾き — Hajiki — Repel, is same as what Futaba-sama had.

影残し — Kage Nokoshi — Shadow Pull (lit. Shadow Leaving)

影渡り — Kage Watari — Shadow Lace

[8] 清めの太刀 — Kiyome no Tachi — Blade of Cleansing... or purification/exorcism.

人斬り包丁 — Hitogiri Houchou — Kill Carver (lit. Murder Kitchen-knife)

バンデッドナイフ — Bandeddo naifu — Bandit Knife, I tried to match it with the description, but should it be Banded Knife?

Chapter 39: Cerberus

Level ups done, equipment upgraded, we made our way through the dungeon better than ever. The usual Skeleton platoons were coming up, getting more numerous as we went in deeper, but that wasn't enough to stop us anymore. If all the Skeleton troopers were as strong as the captains, *maybe* it'd itch a bit.

But before we could feel too proud of defeating enemies left and right, we had reached that place.

"This, has to be the boss room, right?"

A conspicuously large door, no, it'd be easier to call this a gate. Reina's folks are pretty rich, with a mansion and all. This door is as big as their main gate. Otherwise said, it's big enough to let a large truck through if opened.

"I hope the boss is a Skeleton too"

"But we can't know what kind of monster is inside till we look"

Since we're not in a game, there wouldn't be any reason for it to be one. But if the thing in there was a big Skeleton, we'd certainly be more thankful.

"Whatever comes out, we're gonna have to defeat it. So let's believe in our strength and do this"

"Yep, if it's this team, we'll be fine!"

"Kotori's cheering for everyone too!"

We're ready as can be. In spirit, in strength, we're in perfect form condition in both respects.

"Alright, yeah... let's go!"

With great courage, we pushed open the thick gates, and stepped foot into the boss room.

"—!?"

A fierce presence knocked at us the moment we entered. Even in our old

world, if you sharpened your senses, you could somehow sense something like a person's presence... but this, I've never felt something this big. Rather than feel, it was more like I was slapped in the face by it.

Seems like the lord of this chamber doesn't intend on staying hidden.

It's a circular room, big enough that you could hold a pro baseball match in here. It was dark enough that you couldn't see all the way to the back, but torches, spaced evenly on the walls, had automatically caught fire all at once.

"Hyaa!? W-what's that... it's way too big..."

"Yeah, that's, a boss for you..."

Natsukawa-san and Asuna, acting vanguard on either side of me, both swallow hard. I wasn't an exception. Seeing the boss' giant frame illuminated by the flames came as not so little of a shock.

"... Cerberus"

That was the boss, I could only describe it as such. With the supple yet tight muscles of a doberman, it boasted the size of an elephant. Covered in crimson fur that looked as if it was on fire, thinking how similar the color scheme is to all those Red Dogs we've beaten, maybe this guy's their evolved form?

And its most characteristic trait being, its three heads. Three sharp, ferocious faces lined up beside one another, tongues out making rough breaths, pairs of eyes glaring at us, it looked exactly like Earth's depiction of the Hound of Hades

"Nii-san, this monster is clearly too different from anything we've fought before"

"I know. But if we can't beat this guy, there's no going ahead... there's not going, back home"

Facing a beast surpassing even that Armor Bear, I can't say I'm not afraid. Maybe we won't even be a match. Someone could die too. On top of that, my sense of self-preservation is screaming at me.

But I won't withdraw even one step.

"Yes, that's right, you're absolutely right Yuuto-kun. Everyone, we must do this"

To Class Rep's words, everyone nods with strength.

"From its looks, it's not too different from a Red Dog. But in size, it's in a different league all together, so don't panic if it charges. Sakura, Class Rep, if you guys can stop them with your defense magic, we'll go for the kill"

"Yes, nii-san"

"If it's slowing down, it will be better if we can lure it in. Korori, can you find out how it fights?"

"Ehm, it uhm... it goes *blam!* and shoots a lot of fire, so head's up guys! And also, if it got serious, maybe all three heads will go at the same time!"

"If it's a flame thrower, my ice should come in handy. It'll likely decrease our offensive potential, but I'll try focusing on everyone's defense"

"Then the rest of us'll just have to work harder then!"

"Yeah, like we practiced guys. Leave attacking to the vanguard, while the rear focuses on support"

At this time, as though its hunger had reached a peak, the Cerberus sluggishly rose and was about to begin its hunt. Its six bloodthirsty eyes piercing into the prey that is all of us.

Sorry, but I won't be letting you have a single person standing here. Everyone's definitely getting out of this alive.

So please, Goddess of white light, please grant me the power, the power of a Hero, the power to protect everyone—

Our death match with the Cerberus continues.

"Haa... haah... Almost, there..."

Its large, sharp fangs and claws have grazed me many times. My whole body is riddled with cuts, and its occasional fire breaths have scalded my skin. But even so, I've managed to avoid any direct blows, and with Sakura's Healing Light cast down at practically miraculous timing, it never got to anything fatal. I can still move, still fight... But me, and everyone else, our exhaustion is severe.

Nevertheless, We've damaged the Cerberus using all that energy. Slashes from me, Asuna and Natsukawa-san have been engraved on its body uncountable

times, making it bloody all over. All three heads are exhaling hoarse breaths, revealing a color of fatigue.

Somehow, we're all still standing. No one has collapsed yet. But we can't relax. We're at our limits just concentrating on the fight, and to make matters worse, the Cerberus is now in a state of a desperate wounded beast.

“—Souma-kun! Watch out, the boss' mana is going up!”

The one shouting the warning was of course, Takanashi-san. With her Mana Analysis, she can kind of tell when an enemy's magic gets invoked. It's all thanks to this skill the we could know in advance when the Cerberus would shoot its flamethrower, and thus had success in defending against, or evading it.

So Takanashi-san raising her voice this time could only be that the Cerberus was attempting to do something different from usual. From around it, I somehow also sensed a slight presence... a presence of mana, I should rather call it.

“Guys, something's up, get away!”

Tired as they are, Asuna and Natsukawa-san used their respective mobility boosting battle arts without blunder and withdrew. The moment they took distance from the frontlines, the Cerberus drew back its heads and released an extreme roar.

“—oOOOOhn!!”

Instantly, the red fur of the Cerberus dyed in black. Pitch black as if dipped entirely in black ink. Yet its blazing red pupils retained their original glow.

This is getting ugly— I thought instinctively.

“HEY, it's coming! The fire's—”

Overshadowing Takanashi-san's words of warning, all three heads burst out flames. As if, as if it was spitting out every bit of it's accumulated, seething anger towards us.

“*Kuh*, it's going everywhere”

“How do we attack it now!”

The Cerberus bellows its flame in rage. No aim, no nothing, as if submerging everything in hellfire, it spat fire in every which way. As Natsukawa-san correctly observed, we have no way of approaching the layered walls of flame blazing before our eyes.

“GaAAAUuu!”

Instead of attacking, the Cerberus moves blankly ignored us as we have even lost a path of retreat in the torrent of flames. Naturally, it won't burn in the slightest. The Cerberus nimbly crosses the blazing sea of fire.

Its destination being, none of us in the frontlines, but behind us. Damn, it was aiming for the support team.

“Class Rep!^[1]”

(TN: (a joke note, I'm too bored) Why does everyone not just use Ryouko, *Class Rep* just sounds awkward as fuck when I'm translating it.

It's a culture thing, I get it. In old anime (and some modern crunchyroll loligagging) they used to translate stuff like Onii-chan into their names, like Kyouusuke of something. But I don't think that's all that required nowadays. Plus I bet a lot of weeps (not excluding myself) find the inclusion necessary as it gives a sense of the level of intimacy shared by the characters. That is not to say it can't be done in English (I wouldn't know, I'm just a lowly WN reading weeb) but it's because we're weeps that we require it.

But Class Rep. Class Rep tho. it's *linchou* if anyone was wondering. I try to justify it in my head like, *I've seen other TLers do it!* or *It's just one extra syllable to say!* or *How else am I going to imagine a sexy-cool bespectacled bishoujo without calling her Class Rep!?*

I try to do all that but it's kinda getting ridiculous. Is it though? Aren't I just stressed? I'll lie down, then keep translating... Eh, since we're on the subject of weeb stuff, linchou ends most sentences with —wa —da wa, hopefully someone finds that a good thing to know.)

“I know— Eis Defan (Ice Wall) !!”

Aiming to put a stop to the rushing Cerberus, Class Rep used her latest ice attribute magic, an area-wide defense magic called Eis Defan. Its magnitude is leagues greater than the self-protection wall of ice made using Eis Shield. It is a

giant ice barrier capable of holding at bay even a giant monster the likes of the Cerberus.

And up till now, it was because of this magic that the Cerberus had endured aiming for our rearguard.

“GAAa!!”

But there was no stopping that frenzied, jet-black beast. With immense force, the Cerberus slammed its body into the wall of ice. A large crack spiralled along its surface, and the wall seemed close to crumble.

Bent on demolishing the obstacle, the Cerberus spewed flamethrower from its two peripheral necks, and weighing itself on top, it beat the wall with its forepaws.

“KyaAAAAAAAAA!!”

Along with Takanashi-san’s scream of desperation, Class Rep’s Eis Defan is pulverized. Nothing more obstructed the Cerberus.

The walls of flame surrounding us have yet to ease, forbidding any chance of counter-attack. We’re not even 10 meters apart, but a maze of scorch divides us. We have no more time either.

Shit, please, please let me make it. I’m getting there really soon so, please hold on!

“Aaa!? Sakura-chan, run! It’s after you!!”

As Takanashi-san called out, my spine froze. Beyond the flames, I saw the central head of the Cerberus sucking in a noticeably large amount of air. This is when my foreboding changed into conviction.

“SAKURAA—!!”

Something I’d never seen it do in the whole battle, the Cerberus gathered scorching blaze into a point, shooting it as a big fireball. Too fast. The fireball shot and hit at bullet speed. A pillar of fire rose, grand enough to reach the tall ceiling of this room.

“S-Sakura... no...”

No way, I couldn't say. I clearly saw how powerful that fireball was. It wasn't something you could dodge by stepping a bit to the side. And Sakura only had her Lux Shield to defend with. There's no way she could ward off that level of explosion with a simple shield of light.

"Sakura-chan! Sakura-chaan!"

"Don't, Kotori! It's dangerous going there!"

I hear the voices of Class Rep and Takanashi-san from the other side of the flames. *It's at least good that Sakura and those two were standing spaced out...* It's frustrating I can't consider that lucky.

No, not that, that's not it. That's not what I mean.

"N-never..."

Right now, it isn't the time to lament on my small-mindedness, nor my powerlessness.

"Never, forgive—"

It isn't even time to grieve for the loss of my cherished little sister.

"— Just you, I'll never forgive you!!"

Yes, now, right now was time for only revenge. Because I am her brother.

Cross Calibur	The unique Sacred Sword granted to the Hero by the White God. ^[2]
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=====
| Cross Calibur | | The unique Sacred Sword granted to the Hero by the White God.[/tn] |
=====

(TN: So this is the same way they say *White God* in KnM... *snicker*)

Just as those words flow into my brain, the Paladin's Sword in my hands gush in light. I remember. This feeling, it's the same one I had when I awakened as a Hero.

Yeah, right, that's right... this was granted to me, to the Hero, my Innate Skill.

"HaAAAAAAAaaa!!"

I make a swing with the brilliant, dazzling sword of silver. Just that, and the fire wall is cut away like butter.

And I have nothing more in my way.

“GoAAAa!”

Looks like it sensed my presence. The Cerberus turned all three of its heads in my direction. Bearing its fangs, it let out a howl of intimidation. No, not so much intimidation, as it was actually getting ready to attack.

Its thick, beastly paw, one that could easily squash a human body, flies towards me. Of course, garnished with sharp, extended claws. If that hit, it’d certainly work as a devastating blow but it was— so slow.

“Haa!”

I twist my body to dodge, and throw in a swing. As the blade of light passed through, the resilient meat that only gave fractions of an inch even with battle arts was now being cut like a heated knife on butter.

“GyoOAAAAAa!?”

The foreleg flies as my blade arcs into it, the Cerberus bellowing in excruciating pain. So even a monster cries if it loses a leg or two huh.

But I won’t let it be over with only that. This Cross Calibur won’t last forever. So I’ll end it now.

“UoOOOOoh— Tri Slash!!”

First, the head closest to that leg I sent off. The Tri Slashes that occur almost simultaneously shred its tongue, chop its snout, gouge its eyes. This head won’t be doing much anymore, but it needs to be finished off. With a Thrust between the eyes, I end its function.

“—GhAA!”

I guess using two solid battle arts would make time for the other heads to react. The central head gaped its maw and attempted to bite. A simple but valid counter-attack: closing in with the shortest distance and digging in with the fangs.

“Counter”

Seeing through the moment it was about to seal those jaws that could swallow a person whole, I stir my sword. The flat of the sword slams into the central head, making it swivel.

“KhoOOoo—GoAAAa!!”

Its remaining head didn’t try biting but attempted to shoot a fireball. It takes a large breath; the pre-attack action is too simple to understand. Looks like it wants to shoot immediately, so the size is smaller than the one shot at Sakura. It should be somewhat less powerful, but more than enough to barb-a-que someone whole.

But I won’t step back. If I did, I won’t beat this demon.

“Reflector”

Faced with a scorching fireball in my face, I cut. Not the beast, but the flame itself; it may seem weird to say, but I’ve already used this Cross Calibur to wipe away a wall of fire. That being so, there’s no way it can’t do the same for a fireball.

The fireball had split as if avoiding me, and feeling the remnants of explosion some ways behind my shoulders, I leap towards the head. Trampling over the middle head that I had hit with Counter, I swing the sword of light towards the one that shot the fireball.

The brilliant blade enters from the nose, going straight and deep, reaching all the way to the middle of the eyes.

“One, left!”

As I turn, the last one still kept its fangs ready even with two of its heads destroyed. With its mouth gaping, it looked as if wanting to bite again, but seeing the embers leaking from its teeth— I see, so its actually planning to use a flamethrower.

I can’t go betting on Counter or Reflector to cut through that powerful beam. I need to dodge here, but I don’t want to lose this distance. I probably have the stamina and mana to only attack one more time. Lame, I know, but my body

has started creaking as if warning me of its approaching limit.

I can only attack once. I don't have any spare energy to evade, find a weak spot, and attack from there on. Then, I'll have to just go for it.

"Haa!!"

Just as I jump, the area under my feet inundates with a torrent of crimson. If I was a moment late in that instant decision, I'd be roast by now. But the fire hasn't stopped. The Cerberus calmly saw me dodge by jumping, and angled its neck, bent on reducing me to ash with its unending fire breath.

"UoOOOOOOOooh—"

And as the swirl of flame closed in, I kicked the air and shot forward. I happen to know Hi Step. Its not much, but it *is* a technique that allows for mobility in mid air.

Marking a foot in the empty air, I reached it, the root of the Cerberus' neck connecting to its final head.

"— Nero Lightning (Instant Flash) "

The Paladin's Sword's light dazzled brighter, glaring. This was no Slash and neither was it Tri Slash, but a new battle art. The luminescence of my sword extended itself into an overlapping blade of light purposed to slice away my enemy.

With that Paladin's Sword that had become a sort of giant light saber, I swing at the Cerberus' neck with the limits of my strength.

My head felt like it was going white from the torrent of light... But I somehow landed on my feet.

Then, as if its stores of energy were completely emptied, the light from the blade vanished. Along which, came the unbearable fatigue. Heavy, my body's too heavy. I could collapse any second now.

"Fuh, haaa..."

After breathing deeply as if letting out large sighs, finally, my body regained a bit of vitality.

“... I did it, Sakura”

There stood the large Cerberus. Its peripheral heads hideously chopped up, and the one in the middle, completely sliced off. No doubt its dead.

But the gruesome corpse of the monster quickly morphed into light. Towards the death of this sworn enemy of mine, there was no deep kind of emotion, but only, what could perhaps be described as, a mechanical process of absorption. The largest amount of those brilliant particles of light to date had formed, and as usual, they were sucked into my body... leaving only the core at their origin. No trace of the fearsome monster remains.

Ah, over, it's over now. I did it, I avenged Saku—

“—Really nii-san, always overdoing it”

“Wh-... O-oh it's S-Sakura...”

I don't care if the voice is a delusion. I honestly thought.

“I'm very sorry, it seems I caused you some worry... Nii-san look, I'm fine”

From the smog remaining from the flames, a large white sphere of light emerged. Repelling both scorch and soot, inside that beautiful and bizarre ball of light, I could make out a very familiar shape.

“Oracle Field (Heavenly Barrier) , It seems to be an innate skill of the Saintess^[3]”

(TN: For those not in the know (as in, aren't reading Kuro no Maou), firstly, why (naze) !? Anyway, Oracle Field is like, a staple move from one of the main girls in KnM. And a little before, Nero Lightning, Nero is a character from there too. and he uses dem Light attributes with dat special sword too, also Instant Flash. A lot of parallels, Shaman is like an alternate(?) universe from the KnM stuff. So I'll bet you, the reader, will have a greater appreciation for this if you read that one also. Yoshi is actually consistent with the TL schedule too, and doesn't do month-long hiatuses!)

I don't care about the justification. For me, just Sakura, her being safe there, beyond the light, that was all that mattered.

[1] (a joke note, I'm too bored) Why does everyone not just use Ryouko, *Class Rep* just sounds awkward as fuck when I'm translating it.

It's a culture thing, I get it. In old anime (and some modern crunchyroll loligagging) they used to translate stuff like Onii-chan into their names, like Kyouusuke of something. But I don't think that's all that required nowadays. Plus I bet a lot of weeps (not excluding myself) find the inclusion necessary as it gives a sense of the level of intimacy shared by the characters. That is not to say it can't be done in English (I wouldn't know, I'm just a lowly WN reading weeb) but it's because we're weeps that we require it.

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Author's Q&A: Act.4

The 4th arc's theme is undoubtedly allies.

I'll be frank, in meta terms, the Hirano-Nishiyama couple are pretty much mob characters. They're depicted as extras, background characters among the classmates. That being said, Momokawa could also count as one of the same type, but anyway, these two were a just pair of average, normal students.

And when you make these kinds of normal students your allies, your comrades in battle risking life and limb... We can end up with this sort of ending as well.

The main point is, those two weren't especially evil. There was the fear they had from losing a friend to a boss monster, and when they unexpectedly encountered the Orthrus, you really can't blame them for panicking. And so, they entered battle in a very substandard state...

In fact, it was a misjudgement by Kotarou himself, strictly speaking, his mistake was in the execution. Kotarou was himself very scared seeing a two headed Orthrus, but those two were even more terrified. There are set roles for the vanguard and rear support, but he should've considered their mental states, and taken action to let Nishiyama run first.

Their path of escape would have been blocked by fire all the same, but those two might have still had the sensibility to listen to Kotarou, and resolve to fight alongside him.

But that too is a "might have", it was one possibility. The Orthrus, which was a monster much larger than the one they planned to fight, and was basically too much for them to handle.

Either way, Kotarou wasn't a seasoned war general, nor did he have hidden talent in leadership. Suddenly expecting him to read into people's emotions and dish out the best orders would be too tall a tale.

The main aspect of this arc would be: even if you become allies in good

humour, the circumstances can easily break such a bond. It is this weakness, this fragility of mankind that I tried to depicted. The Hirano Nishiyama couple may be mob characters, but that's exactly why they possess hearts and emotions like that of an average human being. So getting a stroke of guts at the last moment, or having the courage to fight back against fear, and other such things that important comrades in a story require are not to be expected from these normal people.

And as they don't have a strong heart, they're not particularly wicked either. But even without having pure evil in them, they call out to shoot Kotarou, and they actually end up shooting him too. That's pretty scary I'd like to think. Getting so easily swayed by the circumstances is, I believe, also the human condition.

Also, I recently got my first review for this story. Thank you very much. Just that, the Kuro no Maou branding had a lot to contribute to it, so I hope to make this story good enough to stand on its own next time!

Well then, let's head to the Q&A corner:

Q. If the Orthrus is eating away at Nishiyama's guts, how come the axe goes through the Orthrus' trunk and Nishiyama's flank at the same time?

A. That's right, if it was still biting in, that would be impossible. But in fact, the Orthrus was already mid-dodge by that point. But it couldn't fully dodge, and ended up getting gutted.

The reason Nishiyama's flank got hit was because the aim was to get the Orthrus' head that happened to be near that region, right. It tried its best and tried to evade that, and got away with a wound to its trunk region... though well, the Orthrus had its whole body already riddled in wounds, so something like that was devastating.

Q. Hirano just kinda died as an aside it looked though?

A. When he shouted "Shoot your Blast, Momokawa and all!" he was already at his limit. After all, his neck was gouged and with that high a rate of blood loss, he went out of the game fast. Kotarou could've tried using his meds to heal him, but he never got the chance. Hirano never got any first aid at all, and so died in that state.

Q. Did they literally forget about Pain Return before shooting Momokawa?

A. They literally did.

And even if they hadn't, they wouldn't be much afraid of some curse they never experienced first hand.

Plus, Nishiyama had that recovery potion hidden away, so in the worst case, there was the logic that she'd manage something even if she was severely wounded.

Q. HiraNishi-san did the stuff couples do, but why're they still on surnames?

A. They are bonded by the deed, but there's stuff like, losing the timing to settle on changing their way of addressing each other, right?

Q. "Futaba-san, she's gotten kinda thinner right?", that true?

A. True as can be.

At the point they met the Hirano Nishiyama couple, Futaba-san had finally reached the same body form as that Super Pochaco I mentioned. Most people may think that that is still a bit fat, but for Kotarou, it was poison for his eyes. Tremendously sexualicious.

Eh? Your chest gets thinner when you diet? Dare you still say that when she has Blessed Body?

Q. The Hero's romcom really got on my nerved you know?

A. Why is that? The Hero, class 2-7's greatest and most handsome young man, our dear old Souma Yuuto-kun, has done not one bad thing. He has been giving it his all, trying to save his classmates who've been thrown into a dangerous dungeon! Just that, on rare occasions, and against his will mind you, he tends to fall into lewd situations...

Be at ease, I'm sure Kotarou-kun will have good things happen as well.

Q. You're killing me with the Nero Lightning and Oracle Field yo!

A. They do have their respective meanings though. These names have some history, but that is completely coincidental to this story. So though it might pique your interest or it might not, I don't mind.

Q. Nero: “Someone called?”

That’ll be it for this time.

The next one, arc 5 will have a story very well described by its title. And in my personally opinion, it’d be the place where the story really gets going. Have fun!